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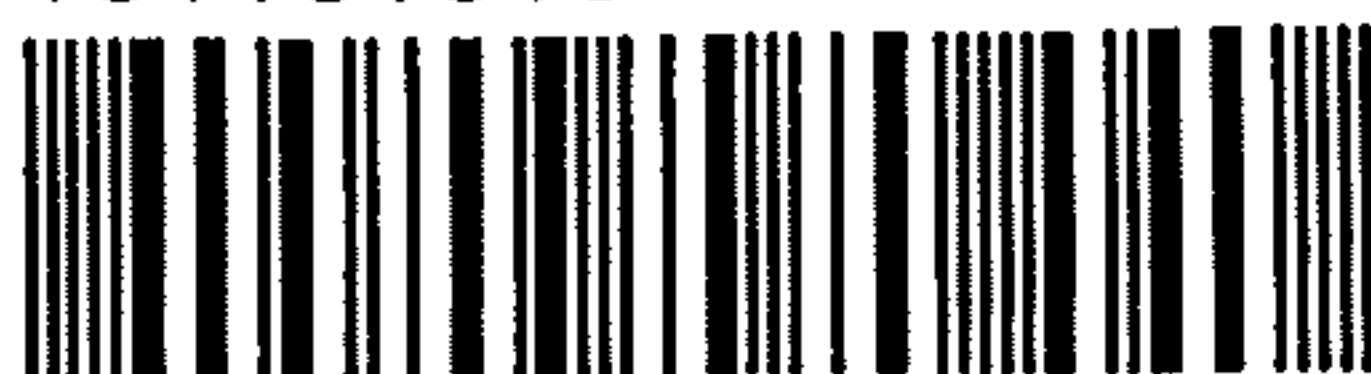
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**A Case Study on Learners' "Skills of Discovery and
Interaction" in Instant Messenger-Mediated Intercultural
Dialogue between University Students in Taiwan and in UK**

Shu-Mei Hung

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in
accordance with the requirements of the degree of PhD on
Education in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law**

Aug 2008

Word Count 70318

ABSTRACT

This study explores foreign language learners' "skills of discovery and interaction" (Byram, 1997) in instant messenger-mediated intercultural dialogue. Five pairs of foreign language learners (five English as Foreign Language learners from Taiwan and five Chinese as Foreign Language learners from the UK) are recruited for participating in the telecollaborative dialogue on each other's cultures. The analysis starts with an ethnographic approach to realize how the specific characteristics of instant messengers (abbreviated as IM) can affect learners' practice of "skills of discovery and interaction" with their online interlocutors in the intercultural exchange. Next, learners' IM chat recordings are analyzed in a fine-grained way by using discourse analysis in combination with other theoretical constructs (question types, politeness, and interculturality) to examine learners' intercultural questioning skills, their strategies of negotiating interactional conventions, and their dynamic co-construction of interculturality between them in the interaction. The findings are triangulated by other data collected from the learners' reflective writings on the WIKI pages, the communication between the researcher and the learners, and the post-exchange questionnaire interview.

By focusing on these aspects, this study attempts to provide an initial operationalisation for researching learners' "skills of discovery and interaction" in online talk and contributes to the research field of "telecollaborative intercultural foreign language education" by providing and discussing the results of using different mediation tools and adopting different research perspectives in this type of study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Pauline Rea-Dickins, for guiding me through the whole process of PhD research and transforming me from a novice and naive research student to a more critical and sophisticated researcher. I am especially thankful for the patience, support and encouragement she has given to me in the process and really admire her wisdom, boundless resource, and endless energy in work.

I would also like to thank Professor Angela McFarlane and Dr. Frances Giampapa for their earlier guidance on the technological and cultural dimensions of my study respectively. In addition, the conduct of this research would have been impossible without the generous help from Professor Yeling Chang of National Kaohsiung Normal University in Taiwan, who recruited five outstanding Taiwanese participants for me.

The support from CREOLE staff and student members of GSoE, particularly Dr. Richard Kiely, Dr. Helen Woodfield and Dr. Katie Scott plays an important role in keeping me going on in the long and tough journey of PhD research. Special thanks is given to Tsui-Lian (Linda) Hsu, who reached out her helping hands when I was at the lowest point of the PhD study and has influenced fundamentally my ways of thinking and critiquing.

Most important of all, the thesis is dedicated to my dearest parents, who always believe I have the potential to achieve my goals and love me without any conditions.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: *Shu-Mei Hung*.....

DATE: 22.08.08.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Motivation and Background*

The idea to conduct this research stemmed from my personal interest and concern with the technological and cultural dimensions of English as Foreign Language (EFL) education.

In the past decade, technologies have transformed the way we teach and learn in an unprecedented way. In the late nineties, what concerned second language teachers and researchers might be “how the new technologies can ‘assist’ teaching and learning?” and “whether technologies can really enhance the effect of learning as compared to the other methods used in traditional classrooms”. At the end of the first decade of twenty-first century, Warschauer (2006) pointed out that technology no longer plays the role of “assisting learning”; instead, it is *part of our learning*. The way human beings negotiate, produce and disseminate knowledge has been transformed radically by technologies. One of the disruptive achievements of technologies is that it enables us to break the limitations of classroom walls. Through internet connection, we are able to see and communicate to people located thousands of miles away from us in real time. When this study was firstly framed nearly four years ago, the Web was still mainly based on the so-called Web1.0 mode¹, which allowed less human interaction than the current Web2.0 mode of internet service. However, an initial literature review at that time and my previous personal experience in using technologies brought me to the belief that the capacity of the internet to facilitate human interaction was going to be crucial in the near future and bring significant impact to the way we live and work, which potentially would bring about reforms in formal school education. Therefore, I decided to focus my research area on internet-mediated telecollaborative foreign language education, which provides an authentic learning context for foreign language learners by connecting them with native speakers or other non-native speakers who are learning the same foreign language.

¹ In Web 1.0, internet users relied on website designers to provide information to them – it is a read-only web world. In Web 2.0, internet users become the content creators and contributors to the web world.

The constant and fast technological development makes it an important and challenging task for educational technologists to be aware of and keep a track of the new learning possibilities, teaching capacities and demands in educational contexts brought about by the new technologies. From the literature review, I formed the understanding that there is a lack of studies on using synchronous communication tools for telecollaborative studies (2.4.1). In view of the popularity of the synchronous communication tool, Instant Messenger (IM), in teenager communication (Thorne 2003, and my own experience of communicating with my classmates), I decided to focus the research on the effects of using IM in telecollaborative learning. In order to broaden the scope of the research, WIKI, the newly-developed software designed mainly for collaborative writing, were also used as the platform for learners to share and reflect on their learning after interacting with each other on the IM.

Furthermore, telecollaborative foreign language learning is inevitably intertwined with cultural issues as it usually involves participants from different national or cultural backgrounds. Cultural issues in foreign language education, which has always been a fascinating area for me, thus became the major focus of this study. In the process of digging into the cultural issue in language instruction, I was amazed at how controversial the issue is and surprised to find myself so ignorant and even illiterate of this dimension in foreign language education. (This is probably the most empirical evidence of how the cultural dimension has been neglected in foreign language education in Taiwan – my country.) The growth in the awareness of the cultural issues in foreign language learning prompted me to find out how culture was positioned in the curriculum goals of Taiwan's EFL education. Take the curriculum goals for senior high school students (10th to 12th graders, aged from 16 to 18) for example. "Cultural literacy and world view" is one of the five core elements² listed in the curriculum outline in English as foreign language education for senior high school students³ in

² The five core elements are 1) language ability including listening, speaking, reading and writing, 2) logical thinking, judgment and creativity, 3) learning strategies, 4) motivation to learn and attitude, 5) cultural literacy and world view. One of the curriculum goals is to develop students' broad world views through cultural understandings.

³ There are separate curriculum outlines for English as foreign language (EFL) education in primary and secondary schools (aged from 7 to 15). Because senior high school education connects with primary/secondary education and university education at both ends, I believe its curriculum outline can provide a better overview of EFL education in Taiwan.

Taiwan. It is separated into two parts: 1) basic abilities for the 10th graders and 2) advanced abilities for 11th and 12th graders. The following is the objectives listed for both abilities: (This information is elicited from the official draft document released by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan in June 2007.)

Basic abilities: (for 10th graders)

1. To be able to know important festivals, social norms and customs of foreign countries.
2. To be able to understand and respect different cultural customs and conventions.
3. To be able to understand the English expression of our own important festivals.
4. To be able to introduce our own and other's cultural customs in simple English.
5. To be able to possess basic world views.

Advanced abilities: (for 11th and 12th graders)

1. To be able to understand and appreciate foreign customs.
2. To be able to understand the basic etiquettes in life of international societies.
3. To be able to compare the differences and similarities of our own and the other's cultures and to understand the sources of these.
4. To be able to introduce our own cultural practices in English.
5. To be able to understand international affairs and to have international views.
6. To be able to integrate cultural knowledge and linguistic competence to solve real-life problems.
7. To be able to develop the concept of a global village and to respect life and the sustained global development.

After carefully examining these objectives with the new insights about culture (2.2.3) I have developed through my literature review, my understanding was that the rationale for this curriculum outline is based on the idea of using English as an international language for intercultural communication instead of using English for communicating with native speakers only. Therefore, we can see the learning target mentioned in these objectives is mainly for international or global interaction. Another characteristic in this curriculum outline is its emphasis on the ability to understand and to introduce one's own cultural practices in English. These two aspects demonstrate that the curriculum outline has identified the role of English being used as an international language and emphasized the role of learners' own culture in learning about a new culture. However, it appears that the objectives in the curriculum outline are mainly based on the "knowledge" dimension of intercultural competency. Although objective 6 in 'advanced abilities' mentioned above is 'to solve real-life problems', the idea is rather vague - we do not know what the "real-life problems"

mean and how they are connected with the cultural knowledge and linguistic competence learners acquire in the English classroom. It seems what the curriculum outline lacks is the pivotal component in Byram's framework of intercultural communicative competence (2.3.2); that is, the skills of discovery and interaction – especially the use of different questioning techniques and social interaction strategies to negotiate and achieve one's purposes in intercultural communication, which is, thus, the research focus of this study.

Influenced by postmodernist views (2.2.3), the way we view or define culture has shifted from more homogeneous and static perspectives toward more heterogeneous and dynamic ones. The change of views on culture has led to the re-conceptualisation of cultural instruction in foreign language classrooms (2.3). I am of the position that supports the dynamic view of culture and emphasizes the development of learners' skills in exploring the culture instead of receiving and memorizing static cultural facts transmitted by language teachers. However, more studies are needed that put these “abstract” constructs of culture and cultural learning into “real practice” so that they can provide us with empirical evidence to illustrate what these skills are like in real communication and to demonstrate the dynamic nature of culture in the use of language for communication so that the academic research can provide foreign language practitioners not only with the “theory of learning” but also the substantial knowledge that is supported by evidence from empirical studies.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

Based on the above motivation and background, I aim to contribute to current developments in research on using telecollaboration for foreign language education by realizing the following objectives:

1. To provide empirical evidence for further illustrating the meaning of the “skills of discovery and interaction” in Byram's framework of intercultural communicative competence
2. To explore the dynamic nature of culture and intercultural communication
3. To understand the use and effects of different technologies such as IM in telecollaborative intercultural exchange

The research questions are:

1. How did the IM-mediated learning context influence the online intercultural dialogue?
2. How did these learners negotiate and co-construct interactional conventions?
3. What questioning techniques are used by the learners to discover each other's culture?
4. How did learners co-construct their interculturality?

1.3 Brief introduction to the setting and overall data collection strategy

The setting was located in a virtual classroom that connects five CFL learners in a UK university with five EFL learners in a university in Taiwan. There were five independent pairs. Each learner only interacted with his or her pair partner (3.5.1). The researcher was also the instructor of this exchange activity, who was responsible for designing and conducting the flow of the whole exchange activities (3.5.3).

Data were collected from the IM chat between these learners, WIKI pages constructed by the learners, pre-exchange questionnaires, participant observation, learner communication with the instructor through IM chat and emails, and post-exchange structured interview through questionnaires.

The effect of the IM-mediated learning context on learners' interaction in this intercultural exchange was investigated through an ethnographic approach (3.4.2). The findings were generated from analyzing the data collected from participant observation, learners' communication with the instructor through IM chat and emails, and post-exchange structured interview. Discourse analysis on the IM chat based on the principles of conversation analysis (3.4.3) was conducted to explore learners' "skills of discovery" and "skills of interaction" as well as their co-construction of "interculturality" in this exchange, which was triangulated by learners' reflective writing on WIKI pages, their communication with the instructor through IM chat and

emails, and post-exchange structured interview.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows

Chapter Two - Literature Review: This chapter aims to lay out the conceptual framework that serves as the foundation for the research design and analytical angles of this study. From the review, I have conceptualised the meaning of “culture” in this study, highlighted relevant problems in Communicative Language Teaching, which led to the discussion of the new paradigm “intercultural communicative competence”, and described the methodological approaches and research findings of previous empirical telecollaborative studies. These findings are related to the discussions of “social interaction in intercultural exchange”, “learners’ communicative styles”, “learners’ questioning behaviours”, and “impact from the technology-facilitated learning context”.

Chapter Three – Methodology: this chapter explains the development of research questions and the subsequent choice of research strategies according to the research questions, which include a case study, an ethnographic approach to realise the IM-mediated telecollaborative learning context, and discourse analysis based on the principles of conversation analysis. Methods of data collection and analysis are discussed afterwards. Ethical issues impinging on the conduct of this research are also raised.

Chapter Four – Instant Messenger-mediated Learning Context: This chapter provides an analysis on the effect of the instant messenger-mediated learning context on learner interaction in their intercultural exchanges so that readers of the thesis can be informed about the technological factors that play influential roles in this research, particularly, how these factors relate to learners’ negotiation of interactional conventions (Chapter Five) and questioning behaviours (Chapter Six). This analysis includes learners’ technological background and its impact, the pros and cons of using instant messengers in intercultural exchanges, and the benefits and drawbacks of integrating instant messengers with Blackboard WIKIs in the pedagogical design of

this study.

Chapter Five – Negotiating Interactional Conventions: This chapter focuses on the analysis of learners’ strategies used for establishing relationship and negotiating interactional conventions with their interlocutors. The operationalisation of “social interaction” in the context of intercultural exchange is made through the analysis of the opening and closing parts of these learners’ chat recordings. Two communicative styles are identified: task-oriented and personal-oriented. The discussion of these findings highlights the concept of interactional conventions as negotiated by the interlocutors in the situated context.

Chapter Six – Process of Discovery: This chapter focuses on the analysis of learners’ questioning behaviours and strategies. The purpose here is to provide empirical examples that can demonstrate learners’ questioning techniques in the intercultural exchange. Question types, which were used by previous telecollaborative studies for analysing questioning skills, are examined and additional variables are suggested for the analysis of learners’ questioning behaviours.

Chapter Seven – Co-construction of Interculturality: This chapter analyses the co-constructed intercultural understandings between these learners. This includes how learners made use of the assumed national differences between them in their conversations, and how they co-constructed the differences as well as the similarities between them and debunked previous mistaken understandings about the target culture through the process of discovery and interaction.

Chapter Eight – Conclusion: This chapter provides the summary of main findings, an integrated discussion of the central findings across Chapters Four to Seven, suggestions for pedagogical implications, a critique of the strengths and limitations of this study, directions for further research and a reflection on my part of learning to be a researcher.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Introduction*

The literature review includes three major sections. The first two sections aim at conceptualizing the notions of “culture” and “culture in foreign language learning” respectively. The third section reviews the methods and findings of relevant empirical studies.

In the first major section (2.2), I conceptualize what “culture” is in this study by describing (2.2.1) and critiquing (2.2.2) the traditional “received” view of culture, discussing the postmodernist perspectives of culture (2.2.3) and pointing out the role of individual identity and human agency in the conceptualization of culture (2.2.4). The second major section (2.3) looks at the role of culture in foreign language education. Firstly, in Section 2.3.1, I discuss Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, a widely-used pedagogical approach in foreign language teaching for more than three decades now, by highlighting central issues of relevance to this study embedded within it. Then, in section 2.3.2, I discuss an alternative “intercultural approach” proposed firstly by Byram (1997) and Kramsch (1993, 1998), which suggested replacing the “native-speaker” model of CLT approach with the “intercultural-speaker” model. Following this, in section 2.3.3, I highlight the role of “learner identity and agency” and “skills of discovery and interaction” in the intercultural approach.

In the final part of the review (2.4), empirical studies that have researched the use of telecollaboration as a means for intercultural foreign language learning are analyzed in order to compare and contrast their methodological approaches (2.4.1), their findings relating to: (i) learners’ interactional or conversational styles (2.4.2), (ii) learners’ questioning behaviours in the intercultural exchange (2.4.3), (iii) the technological factors that influenced learner interaction in the intercultural exchange (2.4.4). Finally, a summary of the literature review is provided in section 2.5.

2.2 Conceptualization of culture

2.2.1 “Received” view of culture

The “received” or “traditional” view of culture normally defines culture based on geographical or ethnic boundaries such as countries (British, French, Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, etc.) or a collection of these countries based on an even broader boundary (Western vs. Eastern, European vs. Asian, for example). This view of culture normally assumes that people within a country are brought up and educated by an “all-encompassing systems” of norms or rules that govern the way they behave and lead their life and are passed down from generation to generation (Atkinson, 1999), thus displaying the feature of being relatively unchanging and homogeneous in its nature. This view has served as the foundation for many important academic studies in the history of humanistic research. A typical example is Hofstede’s (1980) research on nationally-based cultural differences, in which he used statistically-oriented quantitative methods to conduct a factor analysis of cultural values contained in survey responses from more than 116,000 IBM employees in forty countries and identified four dimensions of corporate culture: (1) small vs. large power distance, (2) uncertainty avoidance, (3) masculinity vs. femininity, and (4) individualism vs. collectivism. Take the fourth dimension for example. According to Hofstede (ibid), in an individualism-oriented society, the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the contrary, in a collectivism-oriented society, people tend to be integrated into strong and cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. According to Hofstede’s findings, people in eastern countries such as China, Thailand or Japan appear to be very collectivism-oriented while people in western countries such as UK, US or France are mostly individualism-oriented. The cultural differences not only influence the way people lead their life but also the attitude in learning. For example, educational studies (see below) have often argued that Asian students are less critical because their collectivism-oriented disposition urges them to avoid proposing opinions that cause conflict and to view group harmony as the priority.

2.2.2 Problem of the “received” view

Hofstede’s study and other studies with a similar approach (e.g. Hall, 1997;

Trompenaars, 1997) are of value in terms that they have identified different patterns of human thoughts or behaviours; however, using “nations” as a dividing line appears to be problematic and causes stereotypes. Figure 2.1 from Holliday (1999) demonstrates how a prescribed and normative concern with a certain type of large cultural difference (box a) leads in stages to an overgeneralization and exaggeration of those differences and results in stereotypes (box e) and then otherisation (box f).

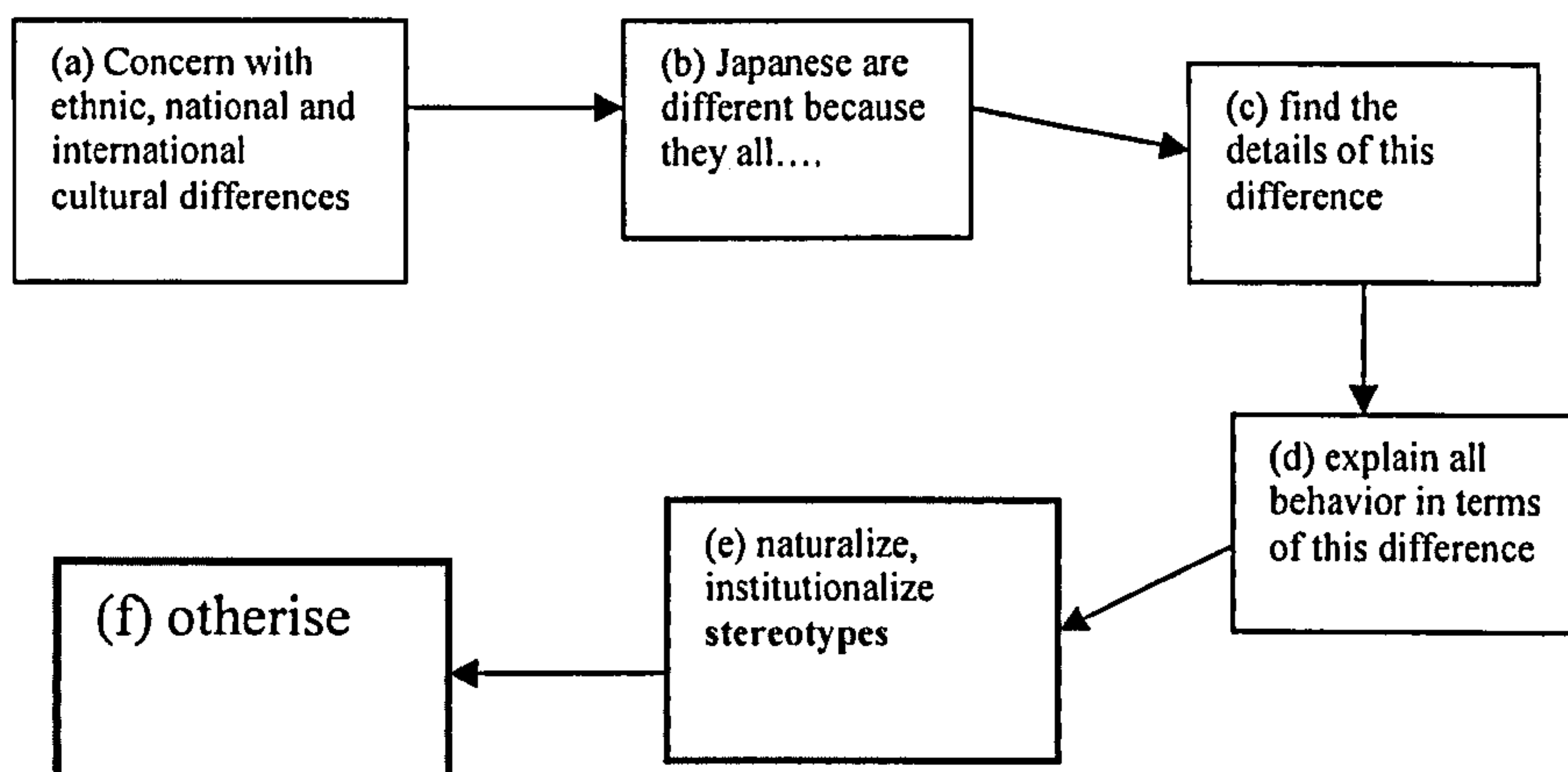


Figure 2.1: Culturist methodology (Holliday, 1999:246)

In the field of TESOL, such kind of otherisation is often seen in the studies about Asian students’ learning behaviours in the classroom. Kumuravadivelu (2007) mentioned that three common stereotypes were often attached to students from Asia: blind obedience to authority, lack of critical thinking skills and passive participation in classroom interaction. He criticized that in spite of the widespread sensitivity to cultural diversity, the TESOL literature was full of stereotypes that are particularly associated with students from Asia and it seemed that

“there exists in the field the practice of homogenization by which nearly three billion people are all thrown into a single cultural basket labeled Asian”
(2007:53)

Kubota (1999) expressed the same concern that authors of these studies draw a rigid boundary and create a dichotomy between Western culture and Eastern culture. The latter is described in ways that emphasize “tradition, homogeneity, harmony, and

group behaviour” while “individualism, self-expression and critical thinking” are used to characterize the former. To debunk the myth, another study of Kubota’s (2001) demonstrated a sharp contrast between the negative images of the US students in the real classrooms and their positive images presented in the TESOL literature. Kubota (2001) pointed out that researchers in TESOL have falsely compared the ideal (not the real) images of American students with the perceived (not the ideal) images of Asian students and exploited the ideal image of the US students to accentuate cultural differences. She called for a “critical multiculturalism” that investigates such “othering” strategies and “transforms the status quo” (pp.27-28), the concepts of which were derived from a postmodernist-influenced view of culture as discussed in the following section.

2.2.3 Postmodernist-influenced view of culture

The emergence and popularity of postmodernist concepts in contemporary academic field has triggered a critical examination of the traditionally received view of culture and gradually changed the way we construct the notion of culture. The postmodernist criticism on the homogeneous and static view of culture has raised at least the following concerns:

1. The diversified, multi-faceted nature of culture

The nationally or ethnically based homogeneous view on culture cannot explain the fact that within any geographical boundaries, cultural practices can vary according to other variables such as gender, generation, occupation, social classes, religion, interest groups and many others. Today’s societies are composed of people who are members of many different groups and, therefore, carry many different identities. Carr (1999) asserted that labels such as ‘British’, ‘Japanese’, or ‘Chinese’ were experienced in real life as a starting point only, open to all kinds of reconfiguration in relation to other variables. Holliday (1999) suggested using a ‘small culture’ paradigm to replace the traditional view on culture; that is, instead of using nations or ethnicity as the main cultural boundaries, gender, age, occupations, religions, and social classes etc can all contribute to cultural differences. From the ‘small culture’ point of view, the various ‘cultures’ are where individuals exist and ‘source’ their identities. A person’s identity

is the result of belonging to a myriad of ‘small cultures’ (Singer, 1999) and is distinct from others. The concept of “homogeneity” in the traditional view of culture is thus unrealistic.

2. The power issue within culture

The diversified and multi-faceted view of culture established the fact that a society is composed of various types of communities or groups, whose values or norms of thinking and behaving can be very different from each other. An issue derived from this phenomenon is about the power relations among these different groups (Christensen, 1994; cited in Byram 1997). Postmodernism criticized that the traditional homogeneous view of culture was just a reinforcement of the values, beliefs and norms from the dominant, “more powerful” or the so-called “elite” groups in a society (Byram, 1997; Kumaravadivelu, 2007) and neglected the diversified nature and multiple voices existing within cultures.

3. The dynamic and changing nature of culture

Postmodernism also criticized the traditional view of cultures as “fixed” and “static” entities, which also implied that human beings are agent-less creatures and can only be shaped by their native cultures. From the postmodernist perspective, culture is seen as a verb (Street, 1993) and a continuous making and remaking process (Holliday, 1999). Being members of a particular social or cultural group may mean being socialized into a particular way of thinking and behaving. This membership, however, does not deprive human beings of the right to be different and depart from the norm. Each individual can be part of the force that contributes to the establishment of a community (a cultural system) in the process of participating and negotiating their roles and views toward this community (Wenger, 1998).

One important reason for culture to be dynamic and changing in nature is because of the inevitable ‘outer influence’ from the contact with people of different cultural backgrounds (Atkinson, 1999; Appadurai, 1996; Clifford, 1992). Ingold (1994, cited in Atkinson, 1999) asserted that:

"The idea that humanity as a whole can be parceled up in a multitude of discrete cultural capsules...has been laid to rest at the same time as we have come to recognize the fact of the interconnectedness of the world's peoples, not just in the era of modern transport and communications, but throughout history. The isolated culture has been revealed as a figment of the Western anthropological imagination. It might be more realistic, then, to say that people live culturally rather than that they live in cultures." (p. 330)

It is believed that globalization that increased the contact between human beings was a long-existing phenomenon in human beings' history. Kumaravadivelu (2004) mentioned the three waves of globalization in world history which were brought about by the sixteenth century European marine power, the nineteenth century industrial revolution and a new era of international cooperation as well as rivalry after the Second World War respectively. These historical events brought people originally distributed in geographically isolated spaces into more frequent contact with each other. Throughout the contact, people influenced each other through exchanging each other's cultural products and experiencing other's cultural practices. New elements were thus brought back to these people's homelands. Some of these new elements gradually merged with the local culture and became a part of the daily cultural practice. The outer influence is particularly unavoidable and largely increased in the modern world when the advance of technology significantly enhances the mobility of people and facilitates the communication among people located distantly from each other. This phenomenon was termed as the fourth wave of globalization by Kumaravadivelu (2004).

4. The negotiated and co-constructed nature of culture

In addition to the outer influence that contributes to the changing nature of culture, postmodernists also views human agency as another force that can resist and modify the cultural norms. This view of culture emphasized an individual's role in the formation of culture. It did not view human beings as passive creatures being silently shaped by their cultures. Instead, it argued that in spite of the fact that some of our identities are given by birth such as ethnic groups and gender, most of our cultural

identities are constructed and negotiated in our everyday discourse. For example, positioning theory (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) viewed the formation of our identities as the interplay between how we project ourselves (the reflective positioning) in the interaction and how others perceive us (interactive positioning). When differences or discrepancies exist between the reflective positioning and the interactive positioning, certain forms of negotiation might occur, which could lead to a re-constructed roles between us and others.

Jacoby and Ochs used the term “co-construction” to refer to “the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion, or other culturally meaningful reality” (1995: 171) in human communication. They argued that our “internal potentialities” (such as our attitude, knowledge or competence) become relevant to communication through social interaction and are brought to apply on the constitution and negotiation of social reality and social relationship between us and others through the “spontaneous playing out of the sequentially contingent and co-constructed external flow of interactional events” (1995: 175). Studies (for example He, 1995) that followed this view attempted to reveal that it is through the linguistic, paralinguistic and nonlinguistic means that interactants “play out, reaffirm, challenge, maintain, and modify their various and complexly multiple social identities as turn-by-turn talk unfolds” (1995:176).

In a similar vein, researchers such as Rampton (1995) and Blommaert (2005) argued that culture is situational in its meanings and depends on the context in which concrete interactions occur. Under this view, cross-cultural encounters can create an entirely new context in which the rules that will govern the relations between cultures do not exist yet and must be co-constructed by the participants. For Holliday et al (2004), this was viewed as “culture of dealing”. This negotiated and co-constructed nature of culture urged Scollon and Scollon (2001) to mention that the focus in the study of discourse analysis and intercultural communication in the present decade has shifted away from a ‘comparison between cultures or between individuals’ to a focus on the ‘co-constructive aspects of communication’. For researchers, rather than seeking an explanation of how given identities and meanings are communicated or

fail to be communicated, what is sought is “an understanding of how identities and meanings are constituted in and through the interaction itself.”

2.2.4 Interculturality as a topic to be explored

Nishizaka (1995), Mori (2003) and Higgins (2007) proposed the same perspective toward research methodology on intercultural communication. Nishizaka’s study in 1995 provided an innovative approach for exploring intercultural communication that freed us from the traditional constraint derived from the essentialist and homogeneous view of culture (2.2.1). Nishizaka argued that the fact that the participants are ‘culturally different’ is usually taken for granted, as it is treated as a parameter rather than a focus of investigation in the majority of the studies in intercultural communication (Hofstede, 1980 for example). In other words, in these studies, the ‘interculturality’ of the participants tended to be referred to as an independent variable to explain the observable features of the communication in question. Nishizaka pointed out that in this type of research, it is the authors, not the participants themselves, that attribute cultural differences to the participants. An alternative approach Nishizaka suggested is to not take the ‘interculturality’ for granted but to explicate “how it is that the fact of being intercultural is organized as a social phenomenon” (1995: 302). Based on this idea, she proposed that we could treat ‘interculturality’ as a phenomenon to be investigated, instead of a given fact from which the argument starts; that is, ‘interculturality’ can be viewed as a topic to be explored in terms of its nature and features in human interaction instead of a causal factor that results in problems in communication. Therefore, unlike research studies that examine cultural differences for the sake of better understanding miscommunication in intercultural interaction, Nishizaka’s approach seems to be promising in revealing the dynamic, creative and constantly shifting nature of culture and identity.

2.2.5 Individuality and Human Agency

The discussion in section 2.2.3 pointed out that culture is not a completely homogeneous, unified, and fixed phenomenon. The cultural phenomenon attributed to a particular group of people is more likely to be a ‘generalized’ description for a wide variety of unique individuals within a social group. People in a social group may

exhibit some similar beliefs and behaviours because of their shared life experience within a social system operated under a set of rules or norms accepted and agreed by the group of people. However, a postmodernist critique reminds us that underneath the surface of the ‘generalized’ view of culture, there are two important facts about culture that cannot be ignored or denied: they are ‘individuality’ and ‘human agency’. The opposite to a ‘homogeneous and static’ view of culture is a ‘heterogeneous and fluid’ one. The ‘heterogeneity’ implies the ‘uniqueness of each individual’, hence ‘individuality’, while the force that makes culture “fluid” is “human agency”. As individual human beings, we are not passively shaped by our environment. Instead, each individual can react differently to the structural influence by aligning themselves with different beliefs and values or even develop his or her own beliefs and values (Sealey & Carter, 2004). In each encounter in our lives, we are constantly negotiating, constructing and reconstructing the sense of ourselves, who our interlocutors are and how we are relate to each other as well as to the other parts of the world. At a personal level, the way we think and behave can be fluid as we keep developing our sense of self through what we experience in our life trajectory. Who we are depends on how we negotiate with other individuals through verbal or non-verbal communications. At a collective level, different discourses⁴ co-exist in a society and compete with each other while new discourses can also emerge and compete with the old ones.

2.3 Culture in Foreign Language Education

Culture instruction has been claimed to be of great importance in foreign language education. However, because of the complexity in defining the nature of culture and the limited time in class schedules, the cultural dimension in foreign language education is still understudied and sometimes even neglected in the classroom (Atkinson, 1999; Hinkel, 1999; Lazaraton, 2003). Earlier models (Brooks, 1975; Nostrand, 1974; cited in Kramsch 1993) tended to view culture as a relatively stable and static entity made up of accumulated facts. This perspective focused on surface level behaviour, but did not look at the underlying value orientations, nor did it recognize the variability of behaviour within the target cultural community, the

⁴ Here, the word “discourse” refers to the beliefs and values held by a certain group of people in a society

participative role of the individual in the creation of culture, or the interaction of language and culture in the making of meaning. Sercu's (2002:68) comments below demonstrate how the notion of culture in foreign language education has fallen behind its development in other fields.

"In foreign-language teaching, cultural contents continue to be presented from a mono perspectival point of view, and culture continues to be conceived as a static, monolithic, idealised, undiversified object of study."

"It is surprising that this notion of culture persists to date and has remained largely unexamined in view of developments in critical anthropology, philosophy, literature or cultural studies, which have all criticised reductive, static, monolithic and deterministic views of culture, and have come to use postmodernist-influenced concepts of culture."

In this section, I firstly explain how postmodernist-influenced scholars have critiqued the theory of 'communicative language teaching', the dominant pedagogy in second or foreign language education for three decades. Then, I discuss how an 'intercultural approach' proposed by these scholars attempted to address these problems. Finally, I identify the important role of 'skills of discovery and interaction' (Byram, 1997) in the construct of an "intercultural approach".

2.3.1 Problems in "Communicative Language Teaching"

The rise of communicative language teaching (CLT) since the late 1970s has moved the emphasis in foreign language education from grammatical or structural approaches to a more communicative and functional emphasis (Doye, 1996) and has focused on developing the learners' skills in communicative situations. However, its pedagogical framework has been criticized to be constructed on the basis of assimilating native speakers' ability to use and interpret language appropriately in the process of interaction thereby over-emphasizing the 'effective exchange of information' in communication at the expense of neglecting the role of 'establishment and maintenance of human relationship' in it (Byram, 1997).

Byram's (1997) argued that the direct transfer of Hymes' theory of communicative

competence to second or foreign language education was problematic. The reason is that Hymes' theory was constructed within the context of first language acquisition, in which only learners' heritage culture is involved. However, in the context of second or foreign language acquisition, learners are introduced to a new linguistic and cultural system after they have already acquired the cultural system embedded in their mother tongue. How to deal with the contact of two cultural systems within such a context was not taken into consideration when applied linguistic theorists (e.g. Canal & Swain, 1980) adopted Hymes' framework in the formulation of a theory for second or foreign language learning. As a result, the theoretical basis of 'communicative language teaching' narrowly focuses on the assimilation of native speakers' linguistic and cultural competence, ignoring the significance of the social identities and cultural competence that learners already bring with them in the intercultural interaction.

The "cultural assimilation" model embedded in 'communicative language teaching' approach also implied the belief in the existence of a homogeneous, unified and fixed 'target culture' for foreign language learners to acquire. However, as argued in section 2.2.3, this belief promotes stereotyping and is unable to provide a full picture of what culture is. From the postmodernist perspective, a homogeneous view of 'native speakers' is a linguistic myth (Alptekin, 2002) or outdated myth (Kramsch, 1998). Take the English language in Britain for example. Its usage, vocabulary and pronunciation can vary to a certain degree from region to region within the same country. Citizens of Britain are particularly of multicultural backgrounds because of the previous colonial history and the more recent migration waves mainly from other European countries. People in such a multicultural country articulate different voices toward the same social event and display multiple and dynamic ways of life styles. As Alptekin (ibid: 57) argued, the native speaker-based notion of communicative competence "portrays a monolithic perception of the native speaker's language and culture, by referring chiefly to mainstream ways of thinking and behaving." The homogeneous view of English culture appears to be even more unrealistic when we consider the fact that English has become the language of international communication; that is, much communication in English nowadays involves non-native speaker to non-native speaker interactions in situations such as academic

exchanges, business trading or professional collaborations.

Another problem embedded in ‘communicative language teaching’, as argued by Byram (1997), is its solo focus on the effective exchange of information. According to Byram (ibid), successful communication is not judged solely in terms of the efficiency of information exchange. It is focused on establishing and maintaining relationships. He argued:

“The efficacy of communication depends upon using language to demonstrate one’s willingness to relate, which often involves the indirectness of politeness rather than the direct and efficient choice of language full of information.”
(1997:3)

Kramsch and Thorne (2001) distinguished between a modern view of “discourse of truth” and a postmodern view of “discourse of trust”; the former referred to the view of communication as the transmission of information while the latter referred to “a ritual of view of communication” that emphasized the need of involvement and solidarity between the interlocutors in communication and focuses on the sharing of experience, ideas, values and sentiments. Kramsch and Thorne (2001) argued that in official foreign language pedagogy, the notion of ‘communicative competence’ has not, up to now, included communication as ritual (discourse of trust) except in its more codified forms of social etiquette, although the symbolic or ritual uses of the foreign language have been shown to be alive and well in learners’ unofficial uses of the language. Here, Kramsch and Thorne’s (2001) argument appeared to support Byram’s (1997) view that communicative language teaching pedagogy lacks the element of relationship establishment and maintenance in communication.

The difficulty of effective communication in the intercultural context is increased particularly because of the invisible cultural faultlines (Kramsch, 1993; 2003) or rich points (Agar, 1994) inherent in each other’s system of linguistic expressions that can hinder the understandings between the interlocutors. In order to remove these barriers, we need something more than the linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences for communication as claimed by theories of communicative language teaching. Byram (1997) suggested that the more desirable outcome is a learner with

the ability to see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings, as expressed in a foreign language, and those of their interlocutors, expressed in the same language. He thus proposed a model of ‘intercultural communicative competence’ by adding the element of ‘intercultural competence’ into the communicative competence framework.

2.3.2 Emergence of “Intercultural Communicative Competence”

Based on the previous criticism on communicative language teaching, Byram proposed a framework of ‘intercultural communicative competence’ (ICC) by taking van Ek’s (1986) model of ‘communicative competence’ as a starting point and added new perspectives by taking into consideration of other researchers’ findings about ‘human communication and interaction’, including non-verbal communication (Argyle, 1983 & Poyatos, 1992; cited in Byram 1997), skills in interpersonal relationships (Ruben, 1989; cited in Byram 1997), psychological factors (Gudykunst, 1994; cited in Byram 1997) and the power issues raised by Christensen (1994, cited in Byram 1997) under the influence of Bourdieu’s (1990, cited in Byram 1997) theory. The outcome was the addition of an element named ‘intercultural competence’ to van Ek’s model. As Figure 2.2 on the next page shows, ‘linguistic competence’, ‘sociolinguistic competence’ and ‘discourse competence’ on the top row of this figure are elements extracted from van Ek’s model of ‘communicative competence’. In addition to these three elements, Byram suggested the fourth element - ‘intercultural competence’, which represents an interactive and combined force from five components: *savoir être*, *savoirs*, *savoir comprendre*, *savoir apprendre/faire*, and *savoir s’engager* (in French). In English, these correspond to attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. Byram (1997: 50-53) defined each of the components as follows:

“Attitude (*savoir être*): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own;

Knowledge (*savoirs*): knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction;

Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): abilities of identifying ethnocentric perspectives in a document or an event; identify areas of misunderstanding and explain the pre-suppositions in a statement in order to reduce the dysfunction they may cause;

Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire): abilities of acquire new knowledge of a culture and the operating knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction;

Critical cultural awareness (savoir s’engager): an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own the other culture and countries.”

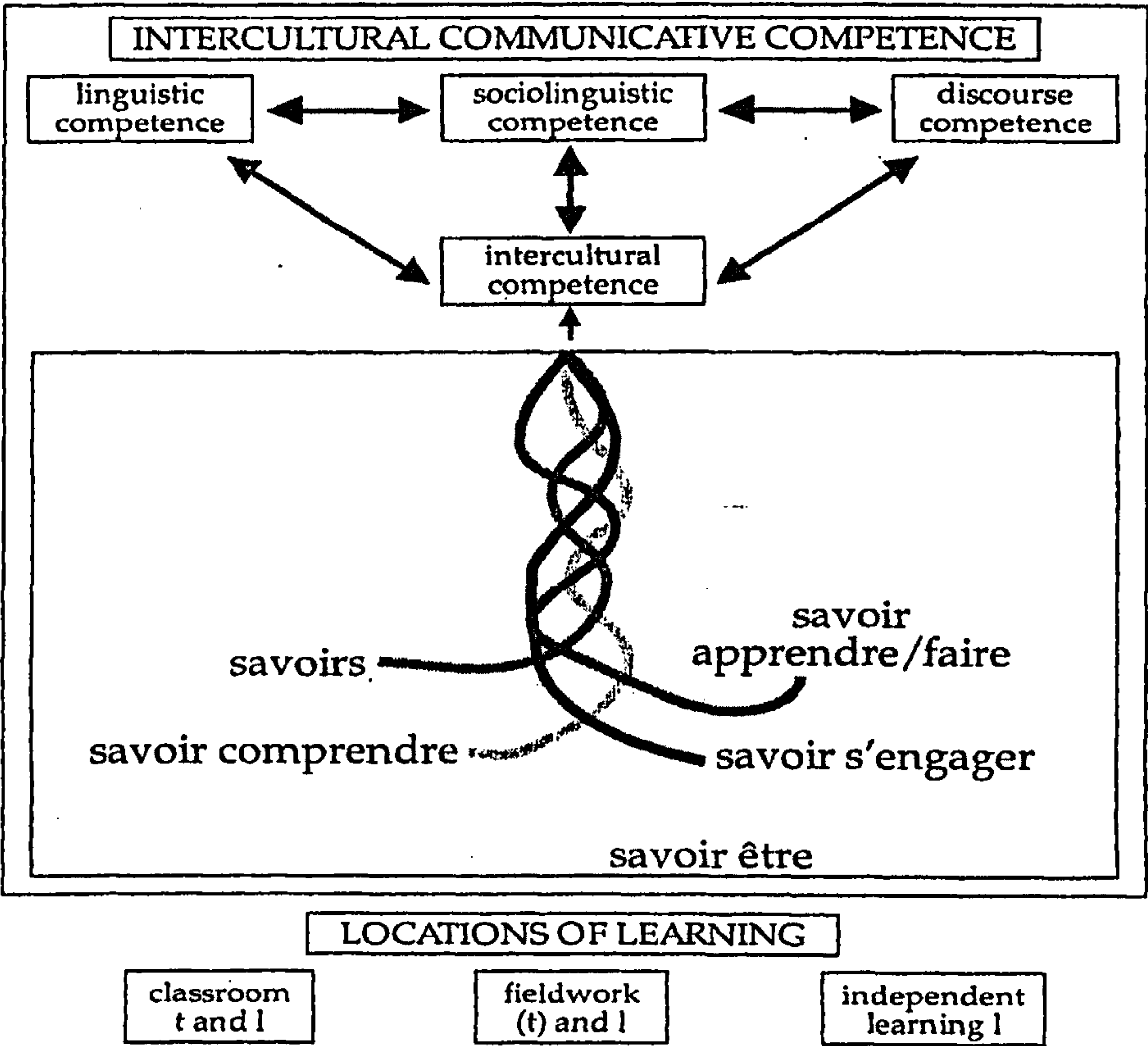


Figure 2.2 Byram’s (1997) framework of intercultural communicative competence

Byram has operationalised each component into several objectives. The detail of these objectives is provided in Appendix G. As shown at the bottom of this figure, this framework also makes reference to the three learning locations where intercultural

communicative competence can be developed, i.e. in the classroom, through fieldwork and through independent learning. The location of learning in this study is through fieldwork – in a virtual sense.

According to my own understandings of Byram's ICC framework and the rationale behind this framework, 'intercultural communicative competence' differs from 'communicative competence' in at least the following three ways.

Emphasizing the 'relationship establishment' in communication

The intercultural speaker-model emphasizes more 'establishing relationship' in the communication, not just 'the exchange of information'. This can be seen in the component of "attitude" and in its emphasis on "skills of interaction". The "attitude" component emphasizes learners' willingness to relate, which needs the relevant knowledge and skills to support in real interaction. Therefore, one objective of the "attitude" component is *"the willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable"* (Byram, 1997: 57) while the objectives in the component of "skills of interaction" include

- 1) *to identify similar or dissimilar processes of interaction and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances*
- 2) *use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country or culture taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country, culture and language and the extent of difference between one's own and the other*
- 3) *use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign (1997:62-63)*

These objectives emphasize learners' ability to see through and mediate the differences between them and their interlocutors so as to negotiate and establish a mutually acceptable interactional convention, thereby establishing a mutually satisfactory relationship between each other.

Emphasizing the skills in learning about new culture

In order to address the 'multifaceted and fluid' nature of culture, the ICC framework

emphasized ‘method’ or ‘skills’ in addition to the ‘content’ in learning about culture. Byram (1997) asserted that foreign language teaching should not attempt to provide representations of other cultures or introduce learners to a ‘culture’, to a particular combination of beliefs, behaviours and meanings “dominant” in a specific society but should concentrate on equipping learners with the means of accessing and analyzing any cultural practices and meanings they encounter. In Christensen’s words (cited in Byram 1997:18), the aim is to provide learners with

“the means of interacting with any speaker of another language, whatever field or capital they bring to the interaction...the quest for culture as essence and object has to be abandoned in favour of method, i.e. a process of investigation where every single social encounter potentially involves different values, opinions and worldviews”.

This approach aims to provide learners with critical tools to explore and to develop their critical understanding of their own and other societies. In Byram’s ICC framework, this aspect is seen in the component of “skills of discovery”, the objectives for which is to “elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena” and to “identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations” (1997: 52-53). The importance of “skills of discovery” lies in its role of transforming language learners from passive receivers of cultural facts into active agents in negotiating and constructing cultural meanings. In a similar vein, Kramsch (1998) proposed the need for the norm of the native speaker to be replaced by that of the ‘intercultural speaker’ who is not bound to fluency in the standard form of a language, but is instead able to negotiate and adapt to differing standards of appropriateness in order to engage in successful communication with others (Canagarajah, 2005).

Balanced treatment of learners’ own culture and the target culture

Finally, the ICC framework has a balanced treatment between the learners’ own culture and the target culture. This can be seen in the components of “knowledge” and “skills of interpreting and relating”, in which learners are required to acquire

knowledge not only about the target culture but also their own cultures so that they can have the ability to identify the ethnocentric perspectives as well as the areas of misunderstandings in both cultures. Learners are thus no longer expected to reject their own culture and take on the target culture, but rather to find what Kramsch (1993) describes as a 'third place'. Kramsch suggests that learners need to locate themselves in a place which "grows in the interstices between the cultures the learner grew up with and new cultures he or she is being introduced to" (p. 236). This concept describes language learners' newly achieved distance from both the home and target cultures and refers to the multiplicity of cultural identities (2.2.3) which belong to all of us, thereby rejecting the fallacy of the essentialist idea that one nation equals to one culture.

Learning outcome: co-constructed "third place" between two cultures

For Kramsch (1993), the outcome of intercultural understanding is not a fixed 'comprehension' of the target culture. Instead, the learners' worldview is being constantly reconstructed, changed and adapted by the contact with the other culture. As Norton (1997) stated, a person's identity will be changed by each activity in which they participate. Every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are, in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation in the intercultural learning. The outcome may also include a growing awareness and questioning of the learners' own values and principles which they had taken for granted until now as indicated by Kramsch's statement below:

"The goal is not a balance of opposites, or a moderate pluralism of opinions, but a paradoxical confrontation that may change one in the process (1993: 231)."

The 'third place' is a state reflecting the impact on learners' own values and worldview after they experience the target culture's perspectives as stated by Kramsch below:

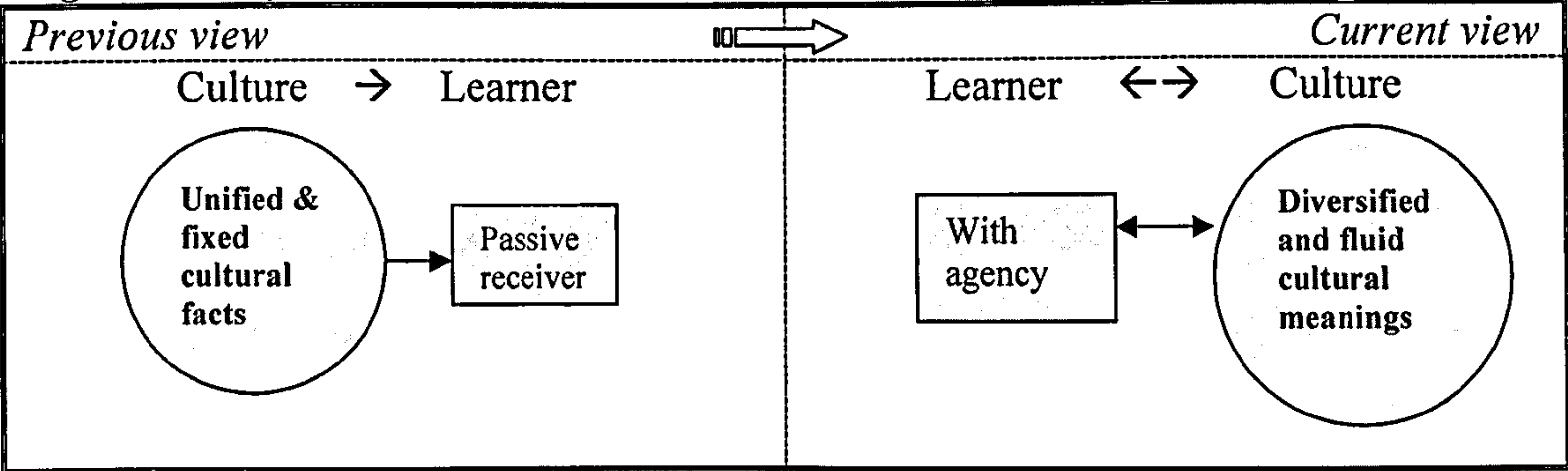
“From the clash between the familiar meanings of the native culture and the unexpected meanings of the target culture, meanings that were taken for granted are suddenly questioned, challenged, problematised. Learners have to construct their personal meanings at the boundaries between native speakers’ meanings and their own everyday life.” (1993: 238)

This view corresponds to Ivanic’s (2006) view that we are constantly changing by each activity we have attended and her belief that learning to feel differently about ourselves or to have a different sense of who we are is in itself a type of learning and one of the outcomes from the social activities is a reconfiguration of participants’ subjectivities, both individually and in relation to one another. The purposes of education are thus not just the transmission of knowledge or improvement of understanding and capability, but also the discursive “reconstruction” of identity. From Jacoby and Ochs’s (1995) view, to acknowledge that everything is co-constructed is to affirm that participants in interaction are not passive robots living out pre-programmed linguistic rules, discourse conventions or cultural prescriptions for social identity. Instead, every interactional moment is a unique space for a response to which subsequent interaction will be further responsive. Every interactional moment is potentially an “opportunity space” for some participant to redirect the unfolding of the discourse such that “individual understandings, human relationships, and the social order might be changed”. (1995: 178)

2.3.3 Learner identify and agency

In sum, an intercultural approach to teaching and reasoning emphasizes the interactive and dynamic nature of culture as well as learners’ identity in foreign language learning. Instead of using the native speaker as the role model and the target for learning, it uses the “intercultural speaker” as the target which means that learners are expected to learn to be able to mediate between two cultures and find their own position between these two cultures. They should be able to exercise their agency in learning by being equipped with discovering and interacting skills and a well-established understanding of themselves (their identities).,As Figure 2.3 shows:

Figure 2.3 Shifted view on culture and learner in foreign language learning



we change the way we conceptualize culture learning from a top-down perspective (the left column) to a more interactive one (the right column). The former puts culture at the centre of learning and the way of learning is for teachers to transmit the selected and ‘well-organized’ cultural knowledge to each individual, whose role appears to be like a passive and “powerless” receiver of static knowledge.

In contrast, the latter puts each individual at the centre of learning, emphasizing learner’s agency and its relationship to the social structures. When the conceptual focus shifts from culture to the individual, we start to notice the ‘self’ and the ‘agency’ of the individuals: their attitude, their relationship to the other, their multiple belongings, their ability to learn and to grow (to negotiate the position), and their critical awareness. In my opinion, the aim of intercultural learning is not the culture itself but the development of the individual. In other words, ‘learner identity and agency’ is the core of the intercultural approach in foreign language learning.

2.3.4 The Relevance of this Study to the Theory

Although scholars who proposed “intercultural communicative competence” have constructed theories for “intercultural learning” from different perspectives (e.g. Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 1997; Corbett, 2003; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat et al, 2003; Paige et al, 2003), they shared similar concerns as mentioned above (2.3.3). Byram is one of very few scholars who extensively operationalised the notion of intercultural competence in instructed foreign language learning (Bredella, 2000:146 cited in Belz, 2007). The fact that Byram’s model has been widely referred to and adopted as an analytical framework in studies of intercultural language learning provides strong support that it is a well-functioning model for teaching and research. This study uses

his model to provide the starting point of this research but attempts to further examine its pivotal component, “skills of discovery and interaction” (c.f. Ch5 & Ch6) within the context of instant messenger-mediated intercultural exchange (c.f. Ch4) between foreign language learners and to investigate learners’ development of intercultural understandings as a process of co-construction and re-construction (c.f. Ch7).

As Byram (1997:12) observed, “The history of language teaching is the history of increasing understanding of the nature of language and the attempts to incorporate new discoveries into methods and objectives.” This study, by connecting learners with culturally-different peers through synchronous online chat, aims to explore the dynamic process of intercultural interaction. By doing so, it is expected that this study can contribute to Byram’s construct of “skills of discovery and interaction” by further operationalising these constructs through analyzing empirical data collected in the virtual fieldwork online. In the next section, I review how previous intercultural telecollaborative studies have been conducted and what findings on “skills of discovery and interaction” have been generated from these studies, which, in turn, have influenced the research angles and analytical directions of this study.

2.4 Intercultural Learning through Telecollaboration

The Internet extends the scope of intercultural language learning from single local classrooms to the global educational settings. As Kern (2006:198) mentioned, “A recent development in network-based language teaching is a shift in focus from single classrooms to long-distance collaborations involving two or more classrooms, often in different countries. This shift expands the focus from language learning to an emphasis on culture (i.e., intercultural competence, cultural learning, and cultural literacy).” The ‘virtual connection’ enables learners to have an authentic experience of communicating with learners from other countries. Because of the linguistic and geographical differences, these two groups of learners are usually assumed to be of different cultural backgrounds as well. By actually interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds, learners are expected to develop their intercultural communicative competence from the experience of managing to communicate

effectively with their interlocutors.

A number of studies have reported learners’ growth in intercultural competence while participating in tele-collaborative foreign language learning (Furstenberg et al., 2001; Müller-Hartmann, 2000; von der Emde, Schneider, & Kötter, 2001; Liaw, 2006).

Since the research focus of this study is on learners’ “skills of discovery and interaction”, I review below how current tele-collaborative studies have researched on this aspect and what have been found in these studies so far. In section 2.4.1, I provide an overview of the methodological approaches adopted in previous telecollaborative studies, which is followed by reviews of the findings about learners’ social interaction (2.4.2), learners’ questioning behaviours (2.4.3) and the impact of the technology-mediated learning context to the intercultural exchange (2.4.4).

Table 2.1 on next page provides an overview of the methodological approaches adopted by twelve telecollaborative studies which have the most impact on the design and conduct of this study.

Study	Participants	Tools	Pedagogical Design	Data Analysis
Furstenburg et al (2001): Cultura Project	USA – France	Discussion forums Individual websites	Three questionnaires to compare different cultural meanings, which serve as source for discussion -- Expands the scope of investigation by comparing films, newspapers and different angles of reports on the same events made in two countries	Inductive analysis on learners' worksheet reports, collective class discussion and messages posted on discussion forums
Bauer et al (2006): Cultura project	USA – Russia USA –Spain	Discussion forums Blackboard		Case studies: thick description of the implementation of the project and thematic analysis of the issues arising in the process
O'Dowd (2003)	UK – Spain	Emails	A series of tasks which serve as springboard for discussion	Analysis of email content – triangulated with interview: describing successful and unsuccessful cases
O'Dowd (2005, 2006)	USA - Germany	Emails & Video-conferencing	Emphasizes the practice of ethnographic interviewing skills through emails and videoconferencing	Analysis of the transcripts – triangulated with interview: showing extracts of tension between the students
Ware (2003, 2005)	USA – Germany	Discussion forums Blackboard	Discusses texts related to the course topic of language in the media with a focus on current events and media	Linguistic analysis (quantitative coding), thematic coding of interview data for salient emergent issues
Ware and Kramsch (2005)	USA – Germany	Discussion forums Blackboard	Course readings and writing prompts for the exchange A language and culture survey at the beginning to serve as the first joint text for discussion	Analysis of forum content – triangulated with interview Episode of misunderstandings
Belz (2002)	USA –Germany	Emails	A series of teacher-guided tasks – getting to know each other, discussion of novels, films on family life, construct a website together	Critical realism: analysis of social, institutional, situated activity and biographical layers
Belz (2003, 2005)		Website construction		Linguistic analysis: quantitative coding and qualitative interpretation of certain selected sentences from transcripts: Episode of failed communication
Kramsch and Thorne (2002)	USA – France	Emails	Starts with a discussion after watching a feature film and then extend to a variety of topics	Case study: analysis of the emails – triangulated with interview Episode of misunderstandings
Jin and Erben (2007)	USA - China	Instant Messengers	Adapts the task design of Cultura Project to serve as springboard for discussion (using Byram's ICC as a framework)	Descriptive statistical analysis on intercultural sensitive scale, constant comparative method to generate themes from interview
Vinegre (2008)	Ireland - Spain	Emails	Gives guidelines about collaborative learning, email frequency and topics to be discussed and the task to be carried out jointly	Quantitative coding (positive vs. negative politeness strategies)
Tudini (2007)	Australian learners of Italian vs. Italian native speakers	Web-based chat room	Learners find chat partners in online chat rooms based on the guided instruction (topics) of course including assessment criteria that encourages learner-initiated negotiation of meaning	Quantitative-based content analysis: count the percentage of learner-initiated negotiation as well as examples of “intercultural negotiations”

Table 2.1: Methodological Approaches of Relevant Studies

2.4.1 Methodological Approach

As shown in Table 2.1, previous telecollaborative studies selected their participants mainly from the US or European countries such as Germany, France, Spain, Italy, UK, and Ireland. Few telecollaborative studies have been found to conduct the intercultural exchanges between European countries and Asian countries. In addition, as shown in column two of Table 2.1, the previous studies mainly used asynchronous tools such as emails and discussion boards for learner communication. Few studies were found to use synchronous tools such as instant messengers or videoconferencing. Pedagogically, these studies were similar in the way that the learners were usually presented with materials that could provide culturally-related issues as prompts for them to discuss and then were encouraged to negotiate their views through emails or discussion boards. One of the major contributions of the Cultura project (Furstenburg et al, 2001) is its design of three comparison questionnaires, which asked participants to write down their definition of terms and then compared their input to their partners'. The comparisons made students "notice" the differences between them; they then posted their questions on the discussion forums for further exploration. This comparison method has influenced a group of following studies such as Belz (2002), Ware & Kramsch (2005) and O'Dowd (2003).

In terms of analytical methods, these studies relied on different strategies of inquiry to find answers to their research questions: both quantitatively and qualitatively. Belz (2003, 2005), Ware (2003, 2005), Jin & Erben (2007) and Vinegre (2008) are examples of studies that adopted a quantitative analysis as their method to answer part of the research questions in their studies. By counting the frequencies of learners' use of certain linguistic categories (Belz, Ware, Vinegre) or comparing responses to the scaled items in the questionnaire in different stages of the project (Jin & Erben), these studies let numbers tell the findings of their research. As Herring (2004) mentioned, the validity and reliability of quantitative measurement in computer-mediated discourse analysis reside in the sound operationalisation of the categories that are used for coding the data. Belz (2003) used "appraisal theories" to reveal learners' attitude in the exchange (one of the components in Byram's framework while Belz (2005) and Ware (2003, 2005) used "question types" as analytical tools to demonstrate learners' questioning skills (c.f. 2.4.3). Vinegre (2008) counted and compared learners' use of

positive and negative politeness strategies to demonstrate how learners socially interact with each other to build the interpersonal relationship. Jin & Erben (2007) adopted an intercultural sensitive scale and listed learners' responses to these questionnaire items in three stages (the beginning, middle and end of the studies) to show how learners' intercultural competence changed during the exchange process. Although a quantitative measurement provided objective evidence to show the differences in learners' behaviours or beliefs, this type of research was not able to reveal the detail of the interaction in learners' communication.

A large number of studies (Kramsch and Thorne, 2003; Ware and Kramsch, 2005; Belz, 2005; O'Dowd 2003, 2006) rely heavily on the analysis of transcripts generated from learners' communication through email, discussion forums, IM or videoconferencing. These researchers formed their arguments toward their research questions by providing excerpts extracted from their learners' conversations that could demonstrate the points they made, which were then triangulated with ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interview conducted by the researchers. Normally, the analysis of cases of failed communication or episodes of misunderstandings and tensions in the communication was the focus of this type of research. By providing detailed analysis of the email or forum messages made by their learners, these studies aimed to reveal what were the possible causes of these failed communications, misunderstandings or tensions between these learners. These studies could thus be categorized as intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) or deviant case sampling (Patton, 2002) as these researchers were interested in these particular cases of failed communication only.

Two issues were observed from these previous studies: 1) they tended to directly apply the ICC framework without further examining the framework itself; 2) they tended to use interculturality (national differences) as a factor to explain their participants' behaviour.

This study does not focus specifically on the failed cases of communication; instead, it aims to further operationalize the component of "skills of discovery and interaction" in Byram's ICC framework and to identify how learners "co-construct" or "co-

deconstruct" the interculturality between them. Specifically, in view of the potential and suitability of Conversation Analysis in revealing the detail of the communication in the micro level (3.4.3), I am interested in applying this method to analyze the learner communication in this study, which has not been seen to be applied in other studies on telecollaborative intercultural exchange.

2.4.2 Social Interaction on Telecollaboration

"Skills of interaction" plays a crucial role in collaborative learning since a collaborative style of learning involves the ongoing and sustained interaction between two people or more. If the interaction fails to proceed in an effective way, the collaboration cannot be fulfilled. The review in this section discusses the findings of previous telecollaborative studies of the role of social interaction in online exchange as well as the misunderstandings caused by the different communication styles between learners.

2.4.2.1 Role of social interaction in online exchange

Arnold and Ducate (2006) analyzed foreign language teachers' social and cognitive collaboration in the online discussion forums by using Garrison et al's (2001) Framework of a Community of Inquiry. The "social presence" in communication is operationalised in their framework into three major components: 1) emotional expression such as humour and self-disclosure for sharing the feelings, attitudes, experiences and interests, 2) open communication including mutual awareness and recognition of each other's contributions, and 3) group cohesion, which includes the activities that sustain a presence of group commitment and focused collaborative communication that builds participation and empathy. Their results indicated that students engaged in a high degree of interactivity as well as all types of social and cognitive presence and showed that social presence was more dominant than the cognitive presence in the students' collaboration for fulfilling the tasks on the discussion boards.

Vinegre's (2008) research findings also indicated that the strategies for shortening the distance among the online learners appeared to play a more important role in the online intercultural exchange than the strategies for maintaining formality and

impersonality in the interaction. She explored learners' social interaction from the perspectives of politeness strategy use based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of politeness theory. She found that her students relied heavily on *positive politeness strategies* especially those relating to "claiming common ground", "assuming or asserting reciprocity" and "conveying cooperation" instead of the *negative politeness strategies*, which are supposed to be used more when the interlocutors are not so familiar with each other, which was hypothesized to be the case in Vinegre's study since her participants have not met each other before they had the intercultural exchange. Vinegre concluded that "the presence of these strategies indicated that fostering closeness, solidarity and cohesion becomes the priority to be achieved between the partners, instead of the expected negative politeness mechanisms whose aim is to demonstrate formality and impersonality." (2008:1022)

O'Dowd's (2003) study pointed out the significant role of relationship building in a successful intercultural exchange. His findings indicated that the reactions learners received from their exchange partners when they talked about their culture in the communication could determine the success level of the exchange. If the learners perceived their partners as being interested in their descriptions of their own culture, then they felt encouraged to write more and, possibly, to learn more themselves and change their attitudes towards the target culture. If, on the other hand, their positive face was threatened (Brown & Levinson, 1987) by their partner's showing a distinct lack of interest in their cultural background; then motivation to write and to change their attitudes rapidly diminished. The more successful pairs in O'Dowd's study were found to be able to develop a personal (or "friendly") relationship with their partners as opposed to simply focusing on the tasks they had been given. In addition, they recognized and reacted to the needs and interests of their partners, answering their questions and encouraging them to write more about the topics which interested them. Apart from the basic information on the topic in question, these learners also provided their partners with personal opinions about the topic. In a word, the ability of the students to build up a personal relationship with their partners, their sensitivity to their partners' needs and communicative style, and their capacity to produce engaging, in-depth correspondence were found to be key aspects of the online interaction which led to the successful development of intercultural communicative competence in the

intercultural exchange conducted in O'Dowd's study.

2.4.2.2 Misunderstandings caused by differences in communication styles

Findings from the above three studies strongly demonstrated that “establishment and maintenance of relationship” between interlocutors is an indispensable element for effective communication. The telecollaborative studies discussed next, from a different research angle, reveal that learners may exhibit different interactional or conversational styles in the online exchange, which in some cases could lead to misunderstandings between each other.

In Kramsch and Thorne's (2002) study, the students were not able to communicate effectively due to their failure to establish a good relationship between the two groups of learners concerned. The reason for the failure was because of the different “local genres” of written communication these learners brought to the global contact. From the data they collected in the online asynchronous intercultural exchange between English as foreign language learners (EFL) in France and French as foreign language (FFL) learners in the U.S. (both are university students), Kramsch and Thorne (2002) found that most of the EFL students in France adopted factual, impersonal, dispassionate genres of writing. These students seemed to construct an image of trustworthiness for themselves in the online interaction by aiming for transmission of objective truths in their statements. By contrast, most of the FFL students in the U.S. viewed communication as a ritual of mutual trust building in this intercultural exchange and expected truth to emerge from direct contact with their French interlocutors on the basis of shared personal experience. Kramsch and Kern (2002) argued that the clash they witnessed in their data was not between individual styles but between two local genres engaged in global confrontation. They believed that “in the intercultural exchanges above, what needed to be negotiated was not only the connotations of words but the stylistic conventions of the genre (formal/informal, edited/unedited, literate/orate), and more importantly the whole discourse system to which the genre belonged” (2002:97-98).

Similar genre differences between students from the US and from France were also reported by Furstenberg et al's (2001) study, in which American students were

found to adopt a more personal and concrete ways for expressing their thoughts while French students were inclined to express themselves in a more abstract ways. In other telecollaborative studies, the clash in communication styles was found between the US students and German students. For example, O'Dowd (2006) attributed the tension in the communication between the German students and their US learning partners in his study to be related to the German students' conversational style that tended to be more direct, with explicit and self-references and that they inclined to defend their own opinions by proving other people's opinions were wrong. O'Dowd's observation echoed the findings in Belz's (2003, 2005) studies. Belz (2003) compared the use of negative and positive appraisals in the communication between the US and German students and found that German students used more negative appraisals in their expression, which could be an indication of a more direct and honest style of communicative style. Compared with the German students, US students tended to prefer to maintain the surface harmony in conversation and regarded German students' directness as being rude. The discrepancy in conversational styles was what caused the failure of the communication between her students.

In Ware's (2005) study, participants from the US and from Germany also displayed different communication styles. However, Ware (2005) interpreted the clash of communicative tones or conversational styles as derived from the different ways of positioning each other between two sides of the learners. Linguistic evidence (the use of second personal pronouns and the frequency of questioning behaviours) was used by Ware to identify these learners' different ways of "positioning" each other. It was found that German students appear to use much more second personal pronouns and ask questions three times as frequently as their US partners in the conversation. She argued that this was because her German students tended to position their US partners as pals and expected to establish a more personal relationship with them so they adopted a more casual and buddy-like language to communicate with their US pals while US students viewed German students as language tutors and tended to use a more formal and task-oriented interactional style in the communication. The difference in positioning resulted in the use of distinctive interactional styles, which then led to the misunderstandings between these students. Ware (2005) explained that the reason that caused the different positioning could be that German students'

proficiency in English was higher than the US students' proficiency so they did not particularly need a language tutor as the US students did. Another reason could be the learners' different attitudes toward the academic grades or marks they could get from the course; that is, the US students in this intercultural exchange cared more about their grades, which resulted in their more task-oriented style of interaction. These reasons proposed by Ware echoed Belz' (2002) findings in her analysis of the social and institutional factors that impacted on the success of the intercultural exchange between her US and German participants.

From a different perspective, Ware & Kramsch (2005) argued that the communication breakdown found in online intercultural exchange could result from the uncertainty about the genre of the activity itself. They argued that the type of exchange in which the students were engaged was fundamentally ambiguous – it was a private dialogue between two students, but it was also a dialogue published on a public space accessible by other learners in this exchange activity. In addition, it was a written exchange but in the form of a spoken chat. Therefore, it was not sure

“How free did the students feel to ramble along, to say whatever they wanted, to be provocative, to jest, or to flirt as the medium often encourages computer users to do? And to what extent did the transformation of a classroom assignment into an Internet chat room exchange not only change the rules of the game but also create the misunderstandings witnessed in this exchange?”

In sum, previous telecollaborative studies have indicated that 1) online learners, although being strangers to each other, adopted more positive politeness strategies to shorten the distance between each other, instead of the negative politeness strategies that help to avoid imposition on each other; 2) a more “friendly or personal-oriented” style of interaction seems to be more favourable for the success of the interaction; 3) misunderstandings can occur when learners exhibited different interactional styles; and 4) the differences in interactional styles were caused by various factors, of which the nationally-based cultural differences were identified to be a salient one.

2.4.3 Skills of Discovery (Questioning behaviours)

In spite of the pivotal role that “skills of discovery” play in the framework of intercultural communicative competence (2.3.2), not many telecollaborative studies were found to explore this aspect in intercultural exchange.

Previous work has suggested that learners’ use of questions is related to the success of intercultural partnerships. For example, Belz (2001:223) reported that the most functional transatlantic groups in her study were those that “engaged in frequent machine gun questions, exhibited many question-answer pairs, and displayed prolonged thematic discussions that spanned multiple electronic turns-at-talk”. That the imbalance of questioning frequency between two sides of learners could cause misunderstanding between the participants was indicated by Ware’s (2003) study. Among the five groups of learners in Ware’s study, four of them showed a striking imbalance in how students on each side used questioning as an interactional strategy. The students in Germany posed questions with three times the frequency of their US peers. This lopsided involvement led to frustration on the part of many German students, who reported that their partners had little interest in them or in jointly pursuing topics.

O’Dowd’s (2003) study showed the reactions the learners got from their interlocutors after they posed their questions affected the success level of the exchange. In the two less successful cases of his study, the questions asked by one of the participants appeared to be neglected by their interlocutors and hence the unpleasant feelings were induced, which resulted in the reinforcement of these participants’ negative stereotypical impressions about their interlocutors. O’Dowd argued that the failure for these questions to elicit responses could be related to the learners’ questioning skills. In other words, the way the questions were raised by the learners was related to what kind of feedback they could get from their interlocutors. One important feature of the successful pairs in O’Dowd’s online intercultural exchange was that they asked questions “which encouraged feedback and reflection” from their partners. In order to produce questions that can encourage feedback and reflection, careful use of questioning strategies is probably the key. Particularly, when the topics involve more sensitive issues as shown in one of O’Dowd’s case, it may be essential that the

learners use proper strategies to mitigate the possible misunderstandings and to express their opinions in a less threatening yet more interesting and understandable way for their interlocutors. Although O'Dowd has emphasized the importance of asking questions that can encourage feedback and reflection in the intercultural exchange, his research focus was not on questioning strategies so he did not give examples of learners' use of proper strategies to achieve this purpose in his study.

Belz's (2005) and Ware's (2003) work explored learners' questioning strategies from the perspective of "question types" they used in their questioning. Schifffrin's (1994) framework of "question types" (3.6.2) was adopted by these two studies as analytical tools. Ware (2003) argued that the way students posed their questions could situate them and their exchange partners in particular communicative roles: those of information-seekers, information-givers, and cultural informants etc. She emphasized that:

It is not simply a matter of students asking and answering, but of becoming aware how, in the very act of asking, responding, or not responding, they are opening up or closing down interlocutor roles for the partners. (Ware, 2003:251)

To address this, Ware (2003) provided examples to show how her participants closed down the scope of original wh- questions by adding either/or questions after the wh- questions. In a similar vein, Belz (2005) provided similar examples to show how either/or questions may preclude intercultural discussion because of their ruling out and devaluing alternative possibilities for the topics concerned. She also argued that the five types of information-seeking questions (why, what/how, opinion, yes/no, either/or) could reflect different potential to elicit the recipient' point of view; for example, the why-questions allows the respondent a relatively wide berth in which to offer his or her viewpoint, whereas an either-or-question compels the respondent to choose between two pre-offered alternatives, which may or may not represent his or her perceived point of view. Belz (2005) thus proposed that by observing intercultural learners' use of specific question types could shed light on the way the learners position their exchange partners as either an 'intercultural informant' or just 'an

arbiter of the questioner's perceptions' while the manner of positioning may also indicate the learners' attitude toward their exchange partners as well as the intercultural exchange itself. It seems that Belz's and Ware's studies have converged in the point that they both viewed wh- questions to be more open in nature and considered more effective in eliciting cultural information than less open questions such as either/or questions.

When comparing the numbers of the question types used by these learners to elicit cultural information from their exchange partners, Belz (2005) expressed that it was particularly disheartening to ascertain the low number of what- and how- questions posed over the course of the seven-week partnership under her study because she believes that the use of what- and how- questions is related to learners' ability of relating knowledge of one's self and one's culture to knowledge of the other and the other's culture (Byram, 1997: 35-37). For Belz, using what- and how- questions was one means of increasing declarative knowledge about the other which may eventually lead to intercultural awareness. However, Belz (2005) did not explore why students seldom used what- and how- questions in the exchange.

In addition, Belz's (2005) detailed qualitative analysis of her participants' specific question types seemed to imply (although she did not explicitly state this) that although question types provided a good starting point for analyzing learners' questioning behaviours, they could not be used as the only indicators in determining learners' questioning techniques. For example, although her students in German appeared to ask more probing questions (by using why questions), their why-questions may be interpreted as a violation of semantic taboos in polite conversation in the US if the various cultural norms with respect to the appropriateness of topics were taken into considerations. In other words, these questions, though being probing, could function as a threat to the US students' negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987), i.e. his wish to be free of imposition, and caused unnecessary misunderstandings. Another example is that although yes/no questions on the average leave less room for the presentation of one's own point of view than wh- questions do, both Belz's and Ware's data demonstrated that yes/no questions may have the

potential to serve as good entry points for further intercultural probing.

The participants' expectations (positioning of their interlocutors) toward the exchange may also influence the nature of the questions being asked, which may not be related to specific question types, either. For example, both Belz's (2005) and Ware's (2005) studies showed that US students tended to view the German students as some type of personal tutor whose function was to help them with their German while the German students were typically more proficient in English so they were less likely to view the partnership as a mediator of their English-language linguistic proficiency but expected to build a more personal relationship with their interlocutors. In addition, a learner's language proficiency can be a factor that caused learners' misinterpretation of their interlocutors' questions. For example, Belz (2005) pointed out that the US students' lower proficiency in German could make them unaware of the operation and meanings of the modal participles used by the German students to soften their attitudinal tone in their questions, which created the situation of what Kramsch referred to as "cultural faultlines", which were invisible to learners and could be the cause of the misinterpretation that resulted in learners' avoidance of answering certain questions.

In summary, these studies pointed out that 1) learners' questioning behaviours and techniques are linked to the success of the intercultural exchange, 2) the use of particular question types can reflect learners' positioning of each other, 3) wh-questions are more favourable in intercultural probing than less open questions such as either/or or yes/no, and 4) more variables (such as cultural norms, language proficiency and learners' expectations toward the intercultural exchange) need to be considered when using question types as indicators of questioning strategies.

2.4.4 Impact from technology-facilitated learning context

Online intercultural exchanges rely on internet technologies to connect the participants located in geographically different places. Mediums or tools that were used for learner communication played a crucial role in online intercultural exchange. The features and functions of a specific medium and tool can be directly related to learners' questioning and interactional behaviours. Learners' various backgrounds in

using technologies can also bring impact to the result of communication. When exploring learners “skills of discovery and interaction” in online intercultural exchange, it is essential to consider the influence from the technology-facilitated learning context. This section thus provides a review on the findings from the previous studies that revealed how the use of tools (asynchronous or synchronous) related to learners’ interactional behaviours and how learners’ divergent experiences in using technologies affected the success of the communication.

Asynchronous tools - Email and discussion boards

Although synchronous tools such as online chat rooms have been available for classroom use for more than one decade, most of the previous telecollaborative studies adopted asynchronous tools (emails and discussion boards) as the medium for learner communication in their pedagogical design. There are several reasons (benefits of using asynchronous tools) for this. First of all, the asynchronous feature of emails or discussion boards does not require learners from different time zones to be online at the same time so it minimizes teachers’ pressure in scheduling the class time mutually available for both sides. For example, Ware and Kramsch (2005:192) mentioned that their decision not to use synchronous tools was made because of the *“logistical impossibility of scheduling both groups to be online at the same time due both to the lack of overlap in class schedules at each university and to the limited hours of Internet access available to the German participants outside of scheduled class time.”* The latter shows the discrepancy in technological access between countries is another reason that increases the difficulty of using synchronous tools for telecollaborative learning.

Another reason is that the asynchronous nature of emails or discussion boards does not require learners’ immediate response to their exchange partners’ posts so as to allow students sufficient time to carefully formulate their thoughts and exchange more in-depth reflections (Furstenberg et al, 2001; Bauer et al, 2006). In Furstenberg et al (2001) study, their learners made use of the discussion forums to ask for clarification of some questions about other tasks and word meanings, to check their own hypothesis about the target culture, and to explain the difference between their own

culture and the target culture. Furstenberg et al (2001) argued that these discussions have helped debunk certain common myths about each other's culture and these forums went much deeper than traditional email student exchanges that often limited themselves to sharing information about each other's daily lives. O'Dowd (2006:107) added that the asynchronous tools could enhance the quality of the exchange content in terms that it allowed learners more time to think and to decide "*what line of questioning will best lead to further exploration*". In addition to this, O'Dowd (2006:116) mentioned that asynchronous tools provided *the convenience for teachers' intervention (for example) and the support for learners who are shy or not confident about interacting with speakers of the foreign language*.

In spite of these above-mentioned benefits, some drawbacks and contradictory findings were mentioned in other studies about the use of asynchronous tools for intercultural exchange. In contrast to Furstenberg et al's (2001) claim that learners had in-depth discussion in online forums, Ware (2003) found that the interface design of discussion boards does not appear to effectively engage learners into a deeper exploration of topics. Ware (2003) herself found that many freshly introduced topics were repeatedly dropped by some of her participants in the group discussion. In her post-exchange interview, her participants attributed the lack of follow-up toward their posted messages, not to their partners' disinterest in or indifference to these posted messages, but to the difficulty of tracking extended discussions in online forums, as one student commented "in part because it requires that you go back and forth to read and re-read topics that might have become old". (2003:264)

Ware (2003) also argued that the use of direct questions did not always lead to interaction in asynchronous medium of communication because failing to respond to questions seemed to carry few negative consequences for the interaction in the short-term maintenance of conversation (e.g. interlocutors continued to write, even in the absence of responses) Similar findings were reported by Belz (2005). In her study, one of the US participants was found to avoid answering some of the questions raised by his German partners in their email exchange. O'Dowd's (2006) finding that the informants can more easily avoid or ignore any difficult or probing questions that they do not wish to answer because they are not communicating face-to-face further

supported the argument about the problem embedded in asynchronous tools of communication. In other words, asynchronous tools make “avoidance or neglect of some questions” an easy-to-use strategy for learners to avoid questions that appear to be difficult or too probing for them. While the avoidance strategies may minimize the unpleasant feelings or direct conflicts between learners, they may facilitate what Ware (2005) mentioned as “missed” communication, which means although the surface harmony is kept, students actually miss the opportunity to further understand the other culture and to enhance their skills of communication about more sensitive or difficult topics.

Furthermore, in contrast to the claim that discussion boards enable in-depth exchange, O’Dowd (2006) argued that the time delay in asynchronous CMC may mean that the process of receiving content from an informant and then sending back further questions becomes slow and tedious such that students never really get a sufficiently rich picture of the world of their partners. Another problem is related to the young generation’s preference in tool use for communication. Thorne (2003) reported that IM has replaced emails to become the most favourable tool for communication between young people. Ware (2005) reported that her US students feel the online exchange as mundane and task-oriented – may be because of the use of tools and the lack of personal touch in the Blackboard interface.

A possible remedy to these problems is the introduction of synchronous communication tools such as chats or videoconferencing.

Synchronous tools – videoconferencing and instant messengers

According to Jin and Erben (2007), although there are a plethora of studies on identifying advantages and disadvantages of using synchronous tools such as instant messengers in workplaces and general education settings, empirical studies (e.g., Lafford & Lafford, 2005; Sotillo, 2005) with a focus on the benefits and drawbacks inherent in IM for second/foreign language acquisition and intercultural learning are far from exhaustive. So far, the findings about the use of synchronous tools such as instant messengers or videoconferencing reported by empirical studies of intercultural

exchange for foreign language learning are mostly positive, emphasizing their facilitation of real conversation and relationship building between the learners.

Through post-exchange questionnaires, Jin and Erben's (2007) participants revealed that IM was a very convenient communication tool for them because it was the tool they used daily for communication with their friends so the use of IM did not cause an extra burden to their regular language learning. Their participants also mentioned they could enjoy a more relaxing atmosphere inherent in IM chat and had a more private space to share with their partners, which helped them follow through and concentrate on what their partners said. In addition, their learners felt that the instant responses from their partners enabled in IM chat made their conversations more enjoyable and evoked more and further interaction. Particularly, some of the students were excited about the quickly established friendship with their exchange partners although they had never met face to face. Although some inconveniences of using IM chat were also reported by Jin and Erben's (2007) participants such as the difficulty to arrange a mutually available time and lack the flexibility in time use allowed by asynchronous tools such as emails, Jin and Erben argued that most student participants were able to overcome these inconveniences to enjoy the advantages brought about by IM chat. In other words, Jin and Erben concluded that "the pleasure and convenience students felt while using this technology in learning seemed to override its inconvenience".

Thorne's (2003) students also held extremely positive attitude toward IM and attributed e-mail as a constraining rather than facilitating variable in the intercultural communication process. They expressed that "E-mail is a tool for communication between power levels and generations (e.g., students to teachers; children to parents) and hence is unsuitable as a medium for age-peer relationship building and social interaction" (2003:56). These students were reported to enjoy a much more successful experience of intercultural foreign language learning when they "migrated" out of a formal educational context (i.e. course uses of email and NetMeeting sessions) and moved into another communicative medium (i.e. IM) for non-class related relationship building and language learning. His students expressed that the shift to the use of IM has helped to move their relationship with their exchange partners over the threshold from class talk to "authentic interpersonal relationship building." For

these learners, IM provided a real conversational environment and Thorne (2003) argued that the “real conversation” facilitated by IM was crucial for learners’ real involvement in the exchange so as to build good relationship with each other, which was the key to the success of the exchange.

O’Dowd’s (2006) study adopted a more advanced form of synchronous tool: videoconferencing. His study showed that videoconferencing provided a “quicker and more direct” channel for learners to clarify doubts and explore theories about the target culture. He argued that the synchronous feature of videoconferencing can facilitate “authentic practice” in developing learners’ skills of discovery and interaction as well as critical cultural awareness. However, Kinginger (1998:510, cited in O’Dowd 2006) warns of “the new forms of language classroom anxiety induced by the stress of public speaking” in a video-linked environment. From this perspective, instant messengers seem to play an ideal role in terms that it enables synchronous interaction but does not cause as much stress as videoconferencing does.

Integrating synchronous tools with asynchronous tools

O’Dowd (2006) suggested that a combination of asynchronous and synchronous tools may provide learners initially with rich, in-depth descriptions (via email or message boards) and then allow them to make follow-up questions via the synchronous medium. He argued that rich descriptions of the home culture are best suited to the asynchronous written mode while discussion and clarification of meaning based on this content can be handled via synchronous mediums.

Learners’ technological backgrounds

In online intercultural exchange, learners’ technological backgrounds, such as their personal experience of using technologies and the different degrees of technological development in each country, can be as influential as their other cultural backgrounds. Thorne (2003) argued that the cultures-of-use of a communicative medium could differ interculturally just as the way communicative genres (Kramsch & Thorne, 2001) were found to be. In his study, the Internet access of the French students was restricted to academic activity in the classroom. They wrote their messages in class

and then passed them to their instructor who then e-mailed them to the American partners from the only Internet connected computer available for this course. By contrast, the American students reported spending more than three hours a day on the Internet and were habituated to the use of e-mail and chat for mediating social, family, and intimate relationships in addition to its use for school and professional communication. The discrepancy of learners' technological backgrounds was identified to be a potential factor that can cause misunderstanding between these students. Belz (2002) and Ware (2003, 2005) reported similar findings that computer know-how and internet access were salient factors that caused the attitudinal divide toward the intercultural exchange between the US and the German learners in their studies.

Bauer et al (2006) however, believes this should not be a serious factor. The Russian – US exchange in the Cultura Project (Bauer et al, 2006:43) demonstrated that the exchange could work very well even when there was technological mismatch between partner institutions – the key lies in whether both institutions can have sufficient communication and understanding of each other's situation during and in advance of the exchange and make participants be aware of this so that unnecessary misunderstandings or tensions will not arise from here.

It is apparent that in previous telecollaborative studies, the existence of the technological divide between countries was identified and the telecollaborative teachers were reminded to take this into serious consideration when designing an online intercultural exchange. However, as internet technologies become more and more widely available to the majority of people in most developed countries and the previously-observed discrepancies in technological access may be gradually levelled, will the problem derived from learners' technological backgrounds still exist in the same way in future online exchanges or will it be a different story? This is one of the issues this study will look into (4.2).

2.5 Summary

Theoretically, this literature review portrays a postmodernist-influenced view of culture, which perceives culture to be multi-faceted, dynamic and negotiated in nature

and brought “individual identity” and “human agency” to the fore of the conceptualization. Based on this definition of culture, a more recent foreign language learning approach was proposed that moves ‘communicative competence’ a step further to ‘intercultural communicative competence’. The latter highlights the importance of ‘relationship establishment and maintenance’ in intercultural communication, the skills for discovering about a new culture, and the role of learners’ own cultural identities in foreign language learning. Learners were re-defined from the ‘passive receiver of fixed cultural knowledge’ to the ‘active agent that negotiates, constructs, and reconstructs their cultural identities in each new encounter’.

Empirically, this literature review examined telecollaborative studies that explored foreign language learners’ skills of discovery and interaction in online intercultural exchanges. Methodological approaches and findings of these studies were compared and contrasted, which provided the direction for the research design and analytical perspectives in this study: particularly the need of i) investigating the use of synchronous tools (such as IM) for telecollaborative learning, ii) further examination on the ICC framework, and iii) taking a non-essentialist view for analysis.

Different from Jin and Erbin’s (2007) study which evaluated the impact of instant messengers on foreign language learners’ development of intercultural competence by analyzing learners’ scores on the intercultural sensitivity scale, this study explores learners’ intercultural competence, particularly the skills of discovery and interaction, by conducting a fine-grained analysis on learners’ actual interaction and communication through instant messengers.

Based on Byram’s (1997) framework of intercultural communicative competence, this study explores i) learners’ negotiation of interactional style (Ch5), ii) learners’ process of discovery in the intercultural exchange (Ch6), iii) learners’ co-construction and reconstruction of intercultural understandings (Ch7), and iv) the influence from the technology-facilitated learning context on the process of discovery and interaction (Ch4).

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with a description of my philosophical position (3.2) that underlies the development of the whole research design. Then, I describe the process of focusing and framing the specific research questions of this study (3.3). These questions then influence my choice of specific research strategies. These include adopting a case study (3.4.1) and ethnographic approach (3.4.2) and the use of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (Herring, 2004) based on the principles of Conversation Analysis (3.4.3). Section 3.5 then deals with the details of data collection, which include the description of sampling and selection of participants (3.5.1), the introduction of each step in the research procedure (3.5.2) and the specification of different types of data source (3.5.3). Next, the methods of data analysis are discussed, firstly, by explaining the rationale underlying the selection of specific cases and episodes for analysis (3.6.1); secondly, by illustrating the process of combining procedure of Conversation Analysis with other theoretical frameworks (3.6.2) in order to address each research question from Chapter 5 to 7; and, thirdly, by describing the grounded approach I have used for answering the research question in Chapter 4 (3.6.3). Finally, some ethical concerns (3.7) in conducting this study are identified.

3.2 Philosophical Position

Opening the book of human civilization, one would be amazed at how broadly and diversely individual human beings in history had contributed to the understanding of our universe. Ontologically and epistemologically, every theory developed in human history has its own selling point. Among them, my way of thinking is close to the postmodernist view that ‘there is no single reality and absolute method for research’. I believe the existence of some reality that can be objectively revealed; I also believe that some ‘realities’ are actually co-constructed through human interaction and interpretation. An important postmodernist idea that has attracted my attention and has influenced the research design of this study is that language, specifically, discourse, plays a crucial role in the construction of knowledge. Meaning is constructed through the dynamic interaction between or amongst human beings, a

major part of which is through the use of language (Punch, 1998). Holliday (2002) also argues that discourse is a major physical artefact of culture which carries much of its power - the discourse and the ideology it carries is a basic tool in enforcing the boundaries of the small culture to which the speakers belong. According to Punch (1998), the fact that meaning is constructed through discourse also reinforces the postmodernist distrust in the existence of absolute truth or objective realities, which reminds us of Usher et al.'s (1997, cited in Punch 1998:207) argument that what postmodernism has left us with is not an alternative or securer foundation of research but "an awareness of the complexity, historical contingency and fragility of the practices through which knowledge is constructed about ourselves and the world."

In the seemingly endless debate between quantitative and qualitative paradigms, the answer to the question of what methodology we should adopt in a research seems to be very simple: it depends on our research questions. As Janesick (1995) stated, researchers should choose appropriate methods that arise from our research questions (instead of starting with a method without any questions in mind). The abundant yet sometimes overlapping and conflicting pool of research perspectives and strategies can mean that there is no single reality, truth and best method in the world – from a postmodernist point of view. Therefore, what we should bear in mind is that we should flexibly and creatively make use of and develop appropriate methods for us to find our answers to the questions that we ask in our studies and do not fall prey to what Janesick described as methodolatry; that is, a preoccupation with "selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told" (1995:215) This approach is clearly reflected in the following two quotes from Holliday (2002).

This makes it possible to devise a qualitative research approach for almost every conceivable scenario. It is therefore very clear that one does not begin by choosing a method. Methods can be sufficiently flexible to grow naturally from the research question, and in turn from the nature of the social setting in which the research is carried out. (2002:21)

The major point is that it is in the writing of the research that sense is made of how the research is crafted to suite the question and the setting, and how the rigour of the process is then made clear and accountable. (2002:21)

There are two dimensions in this doctoral study – technological and cultural. In terms of the technological dimension, because I aimed to give a detailed portrait of how the technology-facilitated learning context has influenced the learner interaction in the intercultural exchange, the approach I used is aligned with what Holliday (2002) has called naturalist qualitative research, which holds that reality is still quite plain to see and the probable truth is supported by an “extensive, substantiated record of real settings”. An ethnographic strategy was thus taken in researching this dimension (c.f.3.4.2). In terms of the cultural dimension, however, the research approach I have used is more towards what Holliday (2002) has described as progressive qualitative research, which views “reality and science are socially constructed.” Discourse Analysis based on the principles of Conversation Analysis (CA) has been adopted for the data analysis (c.f.3.4.3) of this dimension.

3.3 Research Area and Research Questions

According to Holliday (2002), the rigour of qualitative research is in “managing” what has the potential to be a very “messy subjectivity” and central to this managing at the outset is the formulation of research questions – *even if they are likely to change* (2002:31). In addition, even when we have a clear agenda in mind about what the central themes of our research may be, the questions can still be sufficiently open-ended to allow full exploration and emergence of factors and issues during the process of the subsequent investigation, which the research might not have previously considered (Holliday, 2002:33). The process of arriving at the research questions in this study has been very much like the above description.

The initial two questions listed below provided a direction for me to embark on the research.

- (1) How was students' intercultural communicative competence improved through the online intercultural exchange?*
- (2) How did the technological tools influence learner interaction in the online intercultural exchange?*

These were then refined, narrowed down and further operationalised after an extensive review of the literature. In the process of collecting and analyzing the data,

there were also unforeseen discoveries which raised further or different questions. In the beginning, the first initial question was generated under the influence of a group of telecollaborative studies (O'Dowd, 2003; Liaw, 2006; Woodin, 2001 to name a few), whose authors tended to make general descriptions about how their students' performance in their intercultural exchange project related to the objectives listed under the five components in Byram's framework of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (2.3.2). However, after further reading and some initial data collection, it started to emerge in my mind that "skills of discovery and interaction" could be the component (among the five components in Byram's framework of ICC) to which my data would be able to provide the most significant research findings. I thus turned to an investigation of "the skills of discovery and interaction" as the central focus of my study. However, even when my research scope was narrowed down to this single component in the framework, it still presented a considerable challenge to operationalize all of the concepts embedded in this component. I thus needed to narrow down the scope of the research even further to focus on certain specific objectives that Byram has listed under this component only. Two objectives were identified, which seemed to be the essential objectives in this component:

(a) Ability to elicit from an interlocutor (e.g. by using a range of questioning techniques) the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena

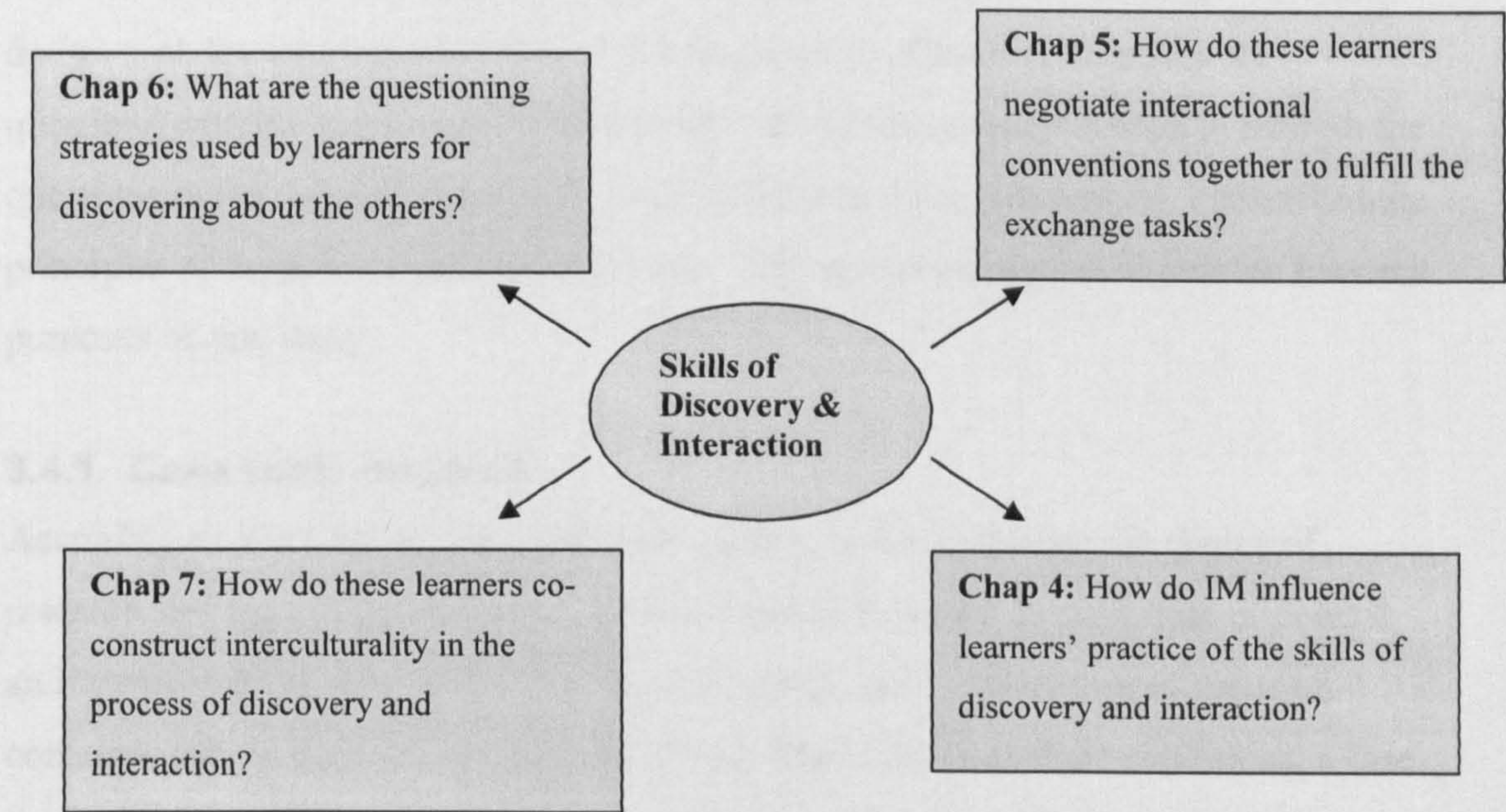
(b) Ability to identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances

Based on the two objectives, the focus of this study was then put on i) learners' questioning strategies and ii) negotiation of interactional conventions. This led to the development of the research questions discussed in Chapters Five (negotiation of interactional conventions) and Six (questioning skills). In addition, the fact that the component of "skills of discovery and interaction" is closely related to the fundamental non-essentialist view of culture underlying Byram's framework of ICC led me to develop the research questions discussed in Chapter Seven (the dynamic co-construction of cultural understandings) so as to enable me to connect the discussion

of the “skills of discovery and interaction” with the non-essentialist construct of culture and its related instructional strategies (8.4).

In terms of the second initial question about the effects of the technological tools in intercultural exchanges, in order to connect with the central concern of this study (the skills of discovery and interaction), I focused the investigation and discussion on how the specific qualities of the selected tool (Instant Messengers) influenced learners’ performing of skills of discovery and interaction in the intercultural exchange and how combining the synchronous tool (Instant Messengers) and the asynchronous tool (WIKIs) could benefit the practice of these skills. In summary, as Figure 3.1 shows,

Figure 3.1 Research Questions



the component of “skills of discovery and interaction” guided the development of the research questions in this study in the way that not only two main objectives within Byram’s framework were explored but also their relationship with the other two issues – “the dynamic construction of cultural understandings” as well as the “technological influences on the practice of it” were also examined.

3.4 Research Strategies

Because of the complexity of the research questions in this study, there are three strategies of enquiry involved in the research design: case study, an ethnographic approach and computer-mediated discourse analysis based on the procedure of conversation analysis (CA). The tenets of these three strategies overlap in the way that each can be characterised as being a “situated activity”, “interpretive” and “naturalistic” in nature and drawing their data sources mainly from “observation”, “field notes” and “conversations” (Lazaraton, 2003). A “thick description” of single cases is their primary concern so their aim is to provide a detailed description of particular settings from the participants’/insiders’ perspectives rather than generating objective accounts of certain phenomenon from the aggregation of large amount of data. In this research, a case study framed the fundamental structure of the research design with the ethnographic approach being used to address particularly the questions with the technological dimension and discourse analysis used to address the questions in the cultural dimension. In the following three subsections, I described the principles of these three strategies and how they have been applied to suit the research purposes of this study.

3.4.1 Case study research

According to Yin (2003), there are three conditions that influence the choice of research strategy: 1) type (form) of research question posed, 2) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events, and 3) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. Based on these three conditions, a case study appears to be the most suitable strategy for me to conduct this research since this study asks “how” questions, focuses on contemporary events and does not set out to control the participants’ behaviours in any way. The design of this study, thus, followed the principles of case study research in that the scope of the study was an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and the analysis relied on multiple sources of evidence with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin, 2003:14). Although the design of the study (**Error! Reference source not found.**) was to set up an intercultural exchange project particularly for the research purposes, the context can be defined as being ‘authentic’ or real-life like in the sense that the students were engaged in real learning activities –

they participated in the exchange project voluntarily for authentic learning purposes. In addition, serving as the basis that structured the fundamental design of this research, the case study worked well and compatibly with the other two strategies of enquiry I selected (ethnographic approach and discourse analysis) in this study because of the same underlying research principles toward an “interpretative approach” and “thick description”.

Yin (2003) argued that multiple-case designs may be preferred over single-case designs when multiple cases are available for research because the analytic benefits from having two or more cases may be substantial – analytical conclusions independently arising from two cases will be more powerful than those coming from a single case alone. Following this rationale, I managed to recruit five pairs of participants (3.5.1) so as to form five potential cases for study. Subsequently, however, only the analytical findings from two cases among the five were presented and discussed in the thesis (3.6.1). Nevertheless, the original design of five cases enabled me to choose “information-rich” cases for analysis (Stake, 1995; Patton, 2002), which has helped to increase the quality of the final research results.

In terms of case selection, Stake (1995:446) argued that the “potential for learning” is a different and sometimes superior criterion to “representativeness” when we are faced with the decision about which cases to study. The researcher should examine various facets in the phenomenon, “selecting a case of some typicality, but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer opportunity to learn.” In other words, the choice is to examine those cases “from which we feel we can learn the most” and “which can give us the best opportunities to learn about the central issues in our research questions.” Patton (2002) makes a similar suggestion in his construct of “intensity sampling” (3.6.1), by which he means the researcher should seek cases of “sufficient intensity” to elucidate the phenomenon of interest. To achieve this, the researcher must do some exploratory work to determine the nature of the variation in the situation under study, and then sample intense examples of the phenomenon of interest. In this study, I have therefore gone through the process of reading and rereading the whole data set collected from the original five cases bearing in mind the central focus of my investigation (3.3). It was through this process that I reached the

decision to present the analysis of two cases in depth because of the relatively rich amount of insights these two were able to produce for addressing the research focus of this study.

3.4.2 Ethnographic approach

Following the methodology of most telecollaborative studies, an ethnographic approach was adopted as the best strategy for me to probe the effects of the technological tools in the intercultural exchange conducted in this study. This is largely because ethnography is concerned with detailed descriptions and in-depth interpretations of cultural behavior so as to provide a comprehensive account of the people who make up the cultural unit and the social practices in which they engage (Lazaraton, 2003). In this research, the ethnographic approach allowed me to provide a detailed account of how the technological tools were used by both the instructor and the learners in their intercultural exchanges and how the characteristics of the tools (IM and WIKIs) and the combination of these two tools contributed or constrained the way that the participants interacted with each other.

According to O'Dowd (2005), there are two main principles underlying an ethnographic approach. First of all, an ethnographic approach aims to identify the meaning people bring to the phenomena. In other words, the focus is on understanding the "emic" perspective or how the learners in question experience and perceive what is happening in their situated learning activities. This is distinct from a quantitative approach, which normally attempts to impose the researcher's perspective and analyze data according to researcher-determined categorization schemes. The process of creating a detailed description of behavior which focuses on the emic or insider's perspective has been referred to as "thick description." (Geertz, 1973) Secondly, an ethnographic approach tends to make use of different types of data in order to achieve more complete and in-depth understanding of the area under investigation, which is generally termed as "triangulation of data". In addition to thick description and triangulation, Lazaraton (2003) has identified two other important characteristics of ethnographic research: prolonged engagement and grounded theory. The former refers to the fact that the ethnographers should spend a significant time with their participants in order to develop a good understanding of the culture under

study. The latter refers to allowing for themes or categories to emerge from the data as opposed to trying to make the data fit the pre-determined categories made by the researcher.

In the process of conducting this study, I attempted to take into account the four principles discussed above. First of all, various types of data including participant observation, questionnaires, learners' communications with the researcher, their input in the WIKI pages and their chat recordings were collected to ensure the reliability of the research findings through the triangulation of all these data sources. In addition, as the instructor of the intercultural exchange, I fully immersed myself in the research setting for an average of two months with each case in order to reach the aim of prolonged engagement. Besides, the role as both the instructor and the researcher (3.5.3) in this study also enabled me to build up a relationship of trust and familiarity with the students, which allowed me to make a thick description of the phenomena through the insiders' perspectives. Finally, data collected were also analyzed with a grounded approach to let the findings emerge from the thematic analysis of different types of data.

3.4.3 Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis

In order to address the questions that related to the focus on the cultural dimension, I sought answers by conducting a discourse analysis of the data collected primarily from the computer-mediated communication between the learners. Among the many different methods available for the analysis on the computer-mediated discourse analysis (Herring, 2004), I am aligned with the principles of Conversation Analysis (CA). The principles and the reasons for adopting this approach are explained as follows.

According to Lazaraton (2003), CA is an inductive approach to examining authentic spoken discourse that has its roots in sociology, but one that has recently been embraced by applied linguistics for research into the discourse of learner interactions in various situated activities of language learning. CA requires the analysis of naturally occurring data by using turns as analytical units and the emphasis is to understand single cases in and of themselves (Lazaraton, 2002; Markee, 2000;

Pomerantza & Fehr, 1997; ten Have 1999; Ellis, 2005). According to Markee (2000), the CA-oriented methodology is capable of showing how meaning is constructed as a socially distributed phenomenon and is based on empirically motivated, emic accounts of members' interactional competence in different exchange systems, capable of exploiting the analytical potential of fine-grained transcripts from the collective data that are normally excerpts of complete transcriptions of communicative events.

Using CA-oriented method in this research has enhanced the data analysis in the following ways. First of all, the "turns" and "sequences" organization of data presentation provides the researcher with an effective mechanism to identify the detail of the interaction through turn-by-turn unfolding of the conversation about how learners negotiate interactional conventions, ask questions and co-construct their understanding of each other. Specifically, in relation to the concept of collaboration (in this study, tele-collaboration), the turn-by-turn analysis has been shown to be effective in evidencing how the participants orient to the task and to each others' turns in the conversation (Stokoe, 2000; Sundrarajun, 2007) Secondly, the fine-grained analytical method of CA is suitable and compatible with the requirement of case study research and an ethnographic approach, which emphasize a comprehensive and detail description of the cases that are under study. As Markee (2000) has pointed out, CA is epistemologically quite close to ethnography as both of these approaches focus on the particular rather than the general and seek to develop a participant's rather than a researcher's perspective of the phenomena being studied. The principle of "unmotivated looking" proposed by Lazaraton (2002) also implies an analytical method of putting participants at the centre instead of the analysts. The aim of the analysis conducted here was thus to look for participants' own orientation to what is going on rather than imposing any pre-determined categories (i.e. the analyst's own categories) onto the analysis of discursive data.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Research Setting and Participants

Patton (2002) identified "emergent flexible designs" as one of the core strategic themes of qualitative inquiry. The research design of this study is partially constrained

by the difficulty of finding suitable participants. Patton suggested the strategy of “opportunistic sampling” as a solution. He mentioned that fieldwork often involves on-the-spot decisions about sampling to take advantage of new opportunities during actual data collection (2002:240). During fieldwork, it is impossible to observe everything. Decisions must be made about what activities to observe, which people to observe and interview, and when to collect data. These decisions cannot all be made in advance. Opportunistic, emergent sampling takes advantage of whatever unfolds as it unfolds. The process of finding and connecting with the participants in this study, which I describe in the following, is close to the principle of opportunistic sampling.

Finding and connecting the participants:

It took me a considerable time to find suitable participants. As Mandarin Chinese is still not a frequently taught foreign language for UK schools or universities, finding suitable Chinese as Foreign Language (CFL) learners for this research proved exceedingly difficult. One colleague, who had planned to conduct research similar to mine, gave up on the idea because of the difficulty in finding participants. I am therefore, not an exception but luckily I eventually managed to locate the participants for my study.

I started the process by looking for the UK participants first since I knew this would be the major difficulty. At the beginning, I tried to contact university teachers and asked about the possibilities of letting me undertake the research with their students. However, it was difficult for me to integrate my research design into these teachers’ fixed syllabus. This proved a sticking point for a period of time. While I was looking for solutions, the idea of “informal learning” came to mind. As the internet has made every corner and every minute a possible opportunity for learning, we do not need to go to the school or library or any institution at any particular time for learning. As long as we are “connected” with the global network, we can access almost limitless amount of information and interact with people in different time zones. Take my research as an example. One of the UK participants conducted one chat session with his Taiwanese learning partner by using the internet in a Youth Hostel in Croatia while he was traveling there. I decided to make use of this considerable potential in

my research design, that is, to construct an informal learning community online for these learners to engage in intercultural exchanges at any time and any place. I thus circulated an email to the language centre of a university in the UK – mentioning the design and the flexibility of this exchange project. Five students from the language centre replied and expressed their interest in my research. However, two of them dropped out while I was contacting the possible participants from Taiwan (I return to how I address this in the last paragraph of this section).

I identified the five Taiwanese participants through the help of my supervisor for my master study. As I needed advanced EFL learners to minimize the linguistic interference in the exchange, she looked for senior students who were majoring in the English Department. Three of the EFL learners were fourth-year students in the English Department of a university in Southern Taiwan; the other two were in the third-year of the same department. All of them had had the experience of staying either in the UK or in the US for language learning, working or traveling, varying from two months to eight months in duration. Mandarin Chinese was their native language. Their competency level in English was close to advanced according to the official score (7.0) they had achieved in the IELTS exam.

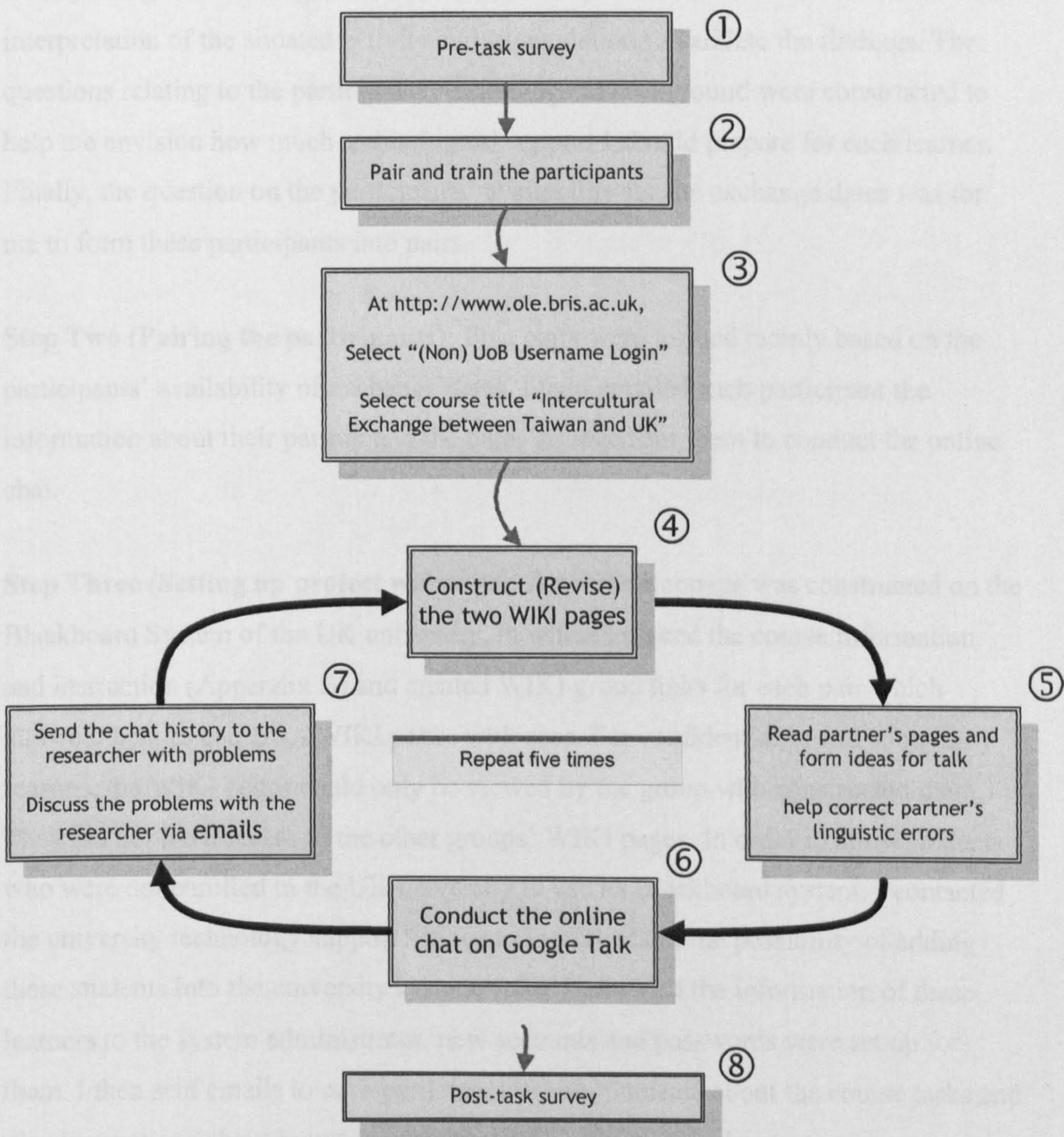
After securing the participants of the five Taiwanese students, I looked for the two other UK participants to replace the two volunteers who replied my emails sent to the language centre but dropped out. I tried to look for potential participants from the pool of my friends and classmates in the UK. Knowing that one Sri Lankan friend was starting a Mandarin course in City Council College, I asked him about the possibility of joining this project – he agreed. The last UK participant was found from one of my classmates in the university, who had expressed her interest in this intercultural exchange during our discussions and responded positively to my invitation to join the group. The three CFL learners found from university language centre were undergraduate students, majoring in different subjects. Two of them were British: the reason for them to learn Mandarin Chinese was for working or traveling in Asia. The third one was an ethnic Chinese, born in England and lived and been educated in England for most of his life. He enrolled in the Mandarin course because his mother tongue was Cantonese and he believed it to be important for him to be able to speak

standard Mandarin Chinese.

3.5.2 Procedure

The whole procedure of the research design included the following eight steps. Figure 3.2 provides a visual representation of the whole process. The number beside each box in the figure matches the sequence of the steps in the following discussion.

Figure 3.2 Procedure of the Study



Step One (Pre-exchange questionnaire / Pre-task survey): Before the exchange activities were conducted, the participants were asked to fill in a pre-exchange questionnaire for me to collect the data about these participants' background and their availability of time for the intercultural exchange (Appendix A). I modified Schuetz's (2005) questionnaire to fit my own context and this comprised four parts: general background, educational background, technology use and availability for the exchange dates. Questions relating to the general and educational background were to help me understand what cultural resources these learners might bring with them when joining this exchange, which functioned as part of the data that I relied on in the interpretation of the situated activity and triangulation to validate the findings. The questions relating to the participants' technological background were constructed to help me envision how much technological support I should prepare for each learner. Finally, the question on the participants' availability for the exchange dates was for me to form these participants into pairs.

Step Two (Pairing the participants): Five pairs were formed mainly based on the participants' availability of exchange dates. I then emailed each participant the information about their partner and the dates arranged for them to conduct the online chat.

Step Three (Setting up project webpage): A course webpage was constructed on the Blackboard System of the UK university, in which I placed the course information and instruction (Appendix B) and created WIKI group links for each pair which allowed them to construct WIKI pages with ease. For confidentiality and anonymity reasons, the WIKI pages could only be viewed by the group who constructed them. They did not have access to the other groups' WIKI pages. In order to allow students who were not enrolled in the UK university to use its Blackboard system, I contacted the university technology support service to inquire about the possibility of adding these students into the university system. After I provided the information of these learners to the system administrator, new accounts and passwords were set up for them. I then sent emails to each participant to communicate about the course tasks and give instructions about how to use the webpage and other tools.

Step Four (WIKI page construction): Before the start of the chat, learners were required to construct two WIKI pages. On the first page, they described their home culture with a special emphasis on describing their current life (school and leisure) as well as their ambitions. On the second page, they were asked to describe their current experience, impression or understandings toward the target culture and mention the questions or areas they would like to explore regarding the target culture. The reasons for asking the learners to talk about their current life (school and leisure) and their ambitions were that it was assumed that these topics would be closely related to them so that they could write productively. Besides, these topics would be of common interest to all of them, so that their difference in educational backgrounds (majoring in different disciplines) would not influence the performance of the talk. The construction of the WIKI pages provided learners with the opportunity to reflect on their views toward their own culture and the other's culture. The content in these pages served as the resource for learners to find topics in their first chat. In addition, they provided the baseline for me (as the researcher) to refer to when I evaluated the learners' perspective shift along the progress of the exchange (e.g. 6.3.2). I did not choose the topic like "what does it mean to be a Taiwanese or a British" to avoid the essentialist idea of culture (2.2.2). By describing their life (past and present) and ambition (future), these learners show their exchange partner their ways of living, thinking and behaving.

Step Five (Read partner's pages and form ideas for talk): The participants formed their ideas for the online chat by reading their exchange partner's two WIKI pages. From their exchange partner's WIKI pages, learners framed their understanding regarding what the target culture was like from their exchange partner's point of view and also what questions or understandings their exchange partners held for their home culture. While the participants read the two pages, they also helped correct some of their exchange partner's linguistic errors by using the co-authoring function of WIKI pages (4.5.1). Their exchange partners could know what changes have been made to their pages by browsing the 'History' function embedded in each page (4.5.1).

Step Six (Conducting the online chat): After reading the WIKI pages, the participants conducted their first talk session with their exchange partners. From the

talk, they discussed and negotiated understandings about their home culture and the target culture. By doing this, they developed different perspectives toward their own culture and new understandings toward the target culture. The participants were encouraged to 'listen' carefully to their partner's responses and ask further appropriate questions. Ethnographic interviewing skills (Corbett, 2003) were introduced to the participants within the course instruction information (Appendix B) so that they could practice these skills while they conducted the real-time conversation online. The CFL learners were suggested to co-switch between two languages if they were able to express certain phrases or ideas in Mandarin Chinese.

Step Seven: After each talk session, the participants were asked to forward the chat history to the researcher. At the same email, the participants were required to describe any problems they had encountered in the talk. The problems could be cultural, linguistic, technological, or personal ones. The purpose was to avoid any possible misunderstandings in the process of interaction and also for the researcher to evaluate the participants' attitude toward the exchange. The researcher would then reply to the emails by addressing the problems the participants had raised. The participants are encouraged to discuss more with the researcher on these questions or comments. The email communication between the researcher and the participants provided another data source for the triangulation of analysis.

Repeat Step Four to Step Seven for five times: After the talk, the participants were asked to revisit their WIKI website and revise the content of their two WIKI pages according to the new understandings they had developed from the online talk. They were asked to modify the content on their home culture page by adding in the aspects they had been asked by their exchange partner, to discuss their new understandings on the target culture page, and to increase the breadth and depth of the questions they wanted to explore further toward the target culture. The participants were encouraged to make at least three changes to each page. These changes then served as the new input for the next talk session, for which they could either continue the previous talk by discussing the old information or starting new topics from the new input they have added to the WIKI pages. Step Four to Step Seven was repeated for five times so in total there were five talk sessions conducted by each pair and each WIKI page had

been revised for five times – the process of learners’ revision and reflective writing in these WIKI pages provided important data for me to confirm the findings generated from the analysis of learners’ IM chat transcripts.

Step Eight (Post-exchange questionnaire / Post-task survey):

The post-exchange questionnaire (Appendix C) aimed to investigate how the participants perceived this exchange project in terms of its course design and the cultural and technological impact it brought to them. Q1 and Q2 are to understand the participants’ perception toward each part of the course design. Q3 to Q5 are to understand how much of these participants’ expectation toward joining this course has been achieved. Q6 is a brief technology survey. Q7 and Q8 are to realize these participants’ perception toward the informal and online mode of learning. Q9 and Q10 is to know whether the learners will continue their interaction with each other even after the course ends and whether they would like to share their WIKI pages with other pairs. Q11 to Q14 is to understand how the learners perceive their change toward the target culture and their own culture after the exchange. In the next section, the rationale for the questionnaire design will be discussed.

3.5.3 Data Sources

Through conducting the above eight steps designed in this research, the following types of data were collected.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a mode of research investigation in which the researcher actively participates in the social situation he or she is simultaneously observing (Yin, 1998). I have played multiple roles in this exchange project: the designer, the instructor and the researcher. For different roles, I have undertaken different responsibilities. As the designer, I constructed the structure of this project (3.5.2) based on what I have learnt from the review of relevant studies (2.4.1). As the instructor, I was more like a facilitator or moderator of this course by giving immediate support when learners had any problems in exchange activities and technological use. Being a designer and an instructor of this exchange project enables

me to do participant observation as a researcher through the conduction of the whole project. By actually designing and instructing the whole course, I was able to have first-hand experience of the difficulties and problems the teachers may encounter when conducting similar activities, which include the communication of the course information and exchange details with learners, engaging in social interaction with them and providing support to the learners when they encountered problems in the exchange activities or in using the internet tools. My role of being an instructor also allowed me to build up a relationship of trust and familiarity with the students so as to be able to interpret their discourse and behavior from a more emic and insiders' perspective, which an outside researcher might not have achieved.

Chapelle, Jamieson and Yuhsoon (1996) warned that data gained from participant observation can be both subjective and anecdotal in nature. Furthermore, teacher/researchers might often find their attention divided between observing and teaching and therefore miss out on important pieces of data. I was aware of these dangers in my combined role as both instructor and researcher in this research and I therefore exploited different techniques indicated in the literature (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in order to avoid them as much as possible. First of all, to avoid engaging in biased interpretations of the data, I carried out member checks (3.6.4). This involved checking my interpretation of the data with that of the actual students from which the data had been collected. I also actively participated in various opportunities of presenting and sharing my research findings with colleagues or other researchers in order to hear alternative interpretations of the data.

Structured interview through questionnaires

The design of the post-project questionnaire is to conduct a structured interview with these participants after the exchange project. As Patton (2002:485) observed, questionnaires represent perhaps the most formal and rigid form of exchange in the interviewing spectrum – the logical extension of an increasingly structured interview. However, Patton (2002) has argued that misinterpretations are common with questionnaires as the distance between the researcher and the respondent makes it difficult to know whether the researcher and the respondent are, for example, sharing

common assumptions and understandings about the questions. In this study, this problem was minimised in terms that I was able to communicate with the participants for further enquiry and confirmation when the answers given by these participants revealed that they might have misinterpreted the meaning of these questions. In addition, the member checking conducted after the data analysis also served to minimise the possible misunderstanding in the process of interpreting their input to these questions. The distance between the researcher and the respondents could have contributed to the quality of the data in terms that these respondents could freely give their answers to these questions without the possible consideration of avoiding too much negative comments toward the evaluation of this project if the researcher were present when they answered these questions.

Email communication

Emails were used for approaching the participants, disseminating the course information and instructions, reminding the participants of the exchange details, discussing with the participants about their feelings and problems in the process of their intercultural exchange with their learning pals, and sending and collecting the pre-exchange and post-exchange questionnaires. All these emails were stored in the web space provided by the email service system. Google Mail was used in this study – it is an ideal place for storing email communication for research purposes because of its daily-increased web space and its function of grouping and searching emails. Another considerable advantage is its integration with Google Talk (IM) – this will be introduced in the next section.

IM chat recordings

IM chat was used not only for the participants to engage in intensive intercultural dialogue but also for the researcher to have synchronous communication with the participants, normally for trouble-shooting and socializing. There are different kinds of instant messenger software available; software such as MSN messenger, Yahoo messenger or Skype chat is often talked about in the area of computer-assisted instruction. This study, however, made use of the more recent software application, Google Talk. What makes Google Talk distinctive to other IM software is its more

integrative design, which combines real-time talk with its email service. The chat data is automatically stored in Google Mail Interface in a format similar to emails with clear records of who and when the chat is made, which can be sent directly as an email to other users and can be edited with all the editing functions available for editing regular emails. Although the design was to use Google Talk for online chat, I also gave the participants the freedom to shift to other software if they felt they were more used to it. Some of the participants accepted and adapted to the new chat tool immediately and appeared to enjoy trying new tools, some of them were already users of Google Talk but still quite a few of them chose other software to use either for convenience or for the difficulty of adjusting to new software quickly (4.2.3).

Blackboard WIKI Pages

There are different sources for using WIKI technology in this study. I chose the WIKI service provided by the University Blackboard System because it is easier and more convenient to use although it also implied that I would not have access to this service once I left this university (4.5.2). Each participant constructed two WIKI pages so there were twenty completed WIKI pages. In addition to these, WIKI technology also recorded the process of learners' revision to these pages so there were also history pages attached to each completed page, which would help me track the change in their perception or attitude.

3.6 *Methods of Analysis*

The first step in the data analysis was to identify which cases and what episodes from these cases I wished to focus on. In this section, I first explain why the selection of cases and episodes was important in this study and how the selection was made (3.6.1). I then describe how Conversation Analysis was used for answering questions from Chapter Five to Seven (3.6.2). Finally, a grounded approach that was used for answering the question in Chapter Four is discussed (3.6.3).

3.6.1 *Selecting/Identifying the cases and episodes for analysis*

Compared to other studies on telecollaborative intercultural exchange, this study has avoided a too general description of learners' intercultural competence in data

analysis (3.3) but chose to focus on “skills of discovery and interaction” only. However, even a single component of “skills of discovery and interaction” can cover and relate to various research angles as indicated by the various objectives listed under this component by Byram (1997) (2.3.2). It was not easy to decide how to provide the richest account of these issues within the word and time limit of a PhD thesis. The sampling of data thus played an important role for me in achieving this. When deciding on which samples to focus, I bore in mind that the aim of the research was not to develop a complete theory that could be applied to all other cases but to develop specific insights on learners’ skills of discovery and interaction that were evidenced by the data collected in this study. As Hutchby (2001:51) claimed, “the logic of CA, however, in terms of data selection, suggests that ‘any’ specimen is a ‘good’ one, that is, worthy of intense and detailed examination.” In the process of reading and re-reading through all the IM chat recordings and WIKI pages of my learners (the complete transcripts of these recordings and WIKI pages are provided in the data CD), the researcher attempted to identify which pairs of learners and which part of their conversations possessed the potential to generate the richest information for providing answers to my research questions. As already mentioned in section 3.4.1, the process is close to what Patton (2002) termed as “intensity sampling”, the logic of which is to select the information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely. Compared to the extreme or deviant cases which may be so unusual as to distort the manifestation of the phenomenon of interest, intensity sampling seeks excellent and rich examples but not highly unusually cases. The following is a brief description of how I found these information-rich cases and episodes (cases within case in Stake’s (1995) sense) from the whole set of chat data collected in this exchange for answering specific research question.

For the research question “*how did the learners use questioning strategies to discover about their interlocutors’ culture?*”, the pair “J & P” was selected as a worked example, instead of the other four, for two reasons:

- 1) the two learners appear to exhibit obvious differences in questioning strategy use
- 2) the three-related episodes on music provide rich examples (specimen) of showing

the questioning strategy use.

For the research question “*how did the learners establish relationship and negotiate interactional conventions with their interlocutors?*”,

1) two pairs of learners (J & P, C & T) were identified because their interactional styles showed obvious difference from the first look of their chat recordings
2) the opening and closing parts of the conversation were chosen as the focuses for analysis because social interaction strategies play the central roles in the opening and closing parts of the conversation (as compared to the main body of the conversation, in which exchange of information and negotiation of meaning are the focus and the build-up of interpersonal relationship is the peripheral focus) - after reading through the whole chat, the researcher found out that learners take the opportunity in the opening and closing part of conversation to build up the “rapport” between each other although constant use of social interaction strategies in other parts of the conversation was also necessary in order to keep the conversation going and maintain the smooth flow of the conversation.

For the research question “*how did learners co-construct interculturality?*”, because the two pairs of learners chosen for answering the above-mentioned two research questions have proved to work well, the researcher decided to focus on the same groups of learners so that the analysis across Chapters five to seven could be connected as a whole in the discussion because the findings were generated from the data extracted from the same groups of learners.

After the samples were chosen, I then started the analysis. Table 3.1 on the next page below shows the relationship between each research question, the selected participants for analysis, its data source and the methods used for the analysis.

Table 3.1 Data type and analytical tools for each research question

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Research Question Focus	Effects of IM-mediated learning context	Negotiating interactional conventions	Intercultural questioning skills	Co-constructing interculturality
Selected Participants	Five pairs of learners	Two pairs: C&T, P&J	Focus on one pair: P&J	Two pairs: C&T, P&J
Data Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- IM chat- WIKI pages- participant observation- post-exchange questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- IM chat- WIKI pages- post-exchange questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- IM chat- WIKI pages- post-exchange questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- IM chat- WIKI pages- post-exchange questionnaire
Analytical Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- grounded approach- thematic analysis from the raw data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- discourse analysis based on CA principles- social interaction strategies adapted from two frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- discourse analysis based on CA principles- question types as analytical tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- discourse analysis based on CA principles- “assumed” and “co-constructed” interculturality

3.6.2 CA-oriented Discourse Analysis

The analysis of data for addressing questions in Chapter 5 to 7 followed the procedure of Conversation Analysis (CA). However, it is not appropriate to claim that this study is fully CA-based because the aim of conducting CA is to discover the structure of human conversation (Markee, 2000), which is not the aim of this study. In other words, this study only adopted the analytical method borrowed from CA while the purpose of the analysis is to discover the learners’ “skills of discovery and interaction” in online talk.

Several researchers (Pomerantze & Fehr, 1997; Schegloff, 1989; ten Have, 1999) in different research contexts have offered suggestions for the task of systematic analysis

of conversation. This study adopted Mazur's (2004) suggested steps of analysis because 1) these steps were constructed by summarizing and synthesizing the work of the above mentioned three researchers, whose works have been widely accepted and applied in different fields of communication research, 2) it is particularly theorized in the context of developing conversation analysis for educational technologists, and 3) Silverman (1998) proposed similar three steps of analysis in his suggestion of Conversation Analysis, which seemed to demonstrate the essentiality of these three steps in Conversation Analysis. Mazur (2004:1085) integrated the above three researchers' methods into the following three steps:

- 1) **“Select a Sequence.** Select either a purposive or an arbitrarily selected segment of a transcript and carefully read and reread the segments, focusing on how the talk is organized. Sequences can be difficult to define, especially in multithreaded online conversation. A good tip is that a sequence has usually ended when speakers are no longer responding to a prior action or topic.”
- 2) **“Characterize the Sequence.** Answer the questions, “What is the speaker doing in this turn?” What is the topic of the conversation? Is the person trying to initiate, repair, or close an interaction. Try to understand what is accomplished in the turns? What is the meaning of the interaction? How is meaning conveyed, received, co-constructed through interaction? What do participants talk about, and how do they signal topic changes or the need to stay on a certain point?”
- 3) **“Consider the Rights, Obligations, and Expectations Constituted in the Talk.** In the course of establishing conventions within talk-in-interaction, inferences can be drawn about the identities, roles, and relationships among and between the participants. These conventions are often obvious in who initiates topics, who closes sequences, and the ways in which these closures or initiations are understood by participants.”

The first step in this procedure is also a process of sampling, from which I selected the sequences that could provide the best evidence to tell the stories I would like to

make from the data, as discussed in 3.4.1.

For steps two and step three, I brought in other theoretical frameworks to facilitate answering the questions of “what is the speaker doing in this turn?” and “what identities, roles, and relationships are constructed between the participants?” These were needed at this stage because, as Mori (2007) quoting He (2004) asserts:

“CA is not a learning theory and thus is not designed to document language acquisition, which entails use of language information/skills for problem-solving and change in behaviour over a considerable period of time” (p.579).

In this study, although the target is not language acquisition but “development of intercultural competence”, the situation (the limitation of using CA in analyzing learners’ discourse) is similar to Mori and He’s condition because learners’ “intercultural competence”, like “language acquisition”, was not considered and documented by CA researchers in its original design either. According to Mori (2007), in order to address this issue, some researchers have combined CA as a methodological framework for explicating details of interaction with other theoretical frameworks for giving an explanation for the process of learning. In this study, I thus drew other theoretical frameworks for supporting the CA approach used in the analysis of data. The particular theoretical frameworks or constructs adopted for each research question are introduced in the following subsections.

Questions as an analytical tool

In seeking answers to the research question “*how did learners use questioning strategies to discover about the other’s culture*”, constructs and categorization of question types played important roles. The operationalisation of different question types helped me to characterize what the learners were doing in each turn of their conversation, which then formed the basis for me to interpret the strategies the learners were applying in the process of pursuing their understanding of their interlocutor’s culture. Following the framework used by Belz (2003) and Ware (2003, 2005) in their telecollaborative studies, the questions used by the learners in this study were initially analyzed with three main types of questions: information-seeking,

information-checking, and rhetorical. According to Schiffrin (1994:165),

Information-seeking questions are asked when the speaker lacks knowledge of a particular state of affairs and wants to gain that knowledge by eliciting information from the hearer. They are divided into five subcategories based on lexical, syntactical and functional criteria: **why –questions, opinion –question, what/how –questions, yes/no –questions, either/or –questions.**

Information-checking questions are designed to confirm or disconfirm the hearer's interpretation of a particular utterance. The information being sought is not the completion of a proposition but reception of a referent or proposition (1994:169-170).

Rhetorical questions are not designed by the questioner to elicit novel information – it is an illocutionary act that has the direct illocutionary force of a question and is not generally used with the expectation of an answer but with some different indirect force, such as a command, a tentative statement, and an evaluation.

However, in the process of applying the above framework in initial data analysis, I found some other factors (6.2.2) that needed to be taken into consideration so as to achieve a well-clarified and more detailed analysis of these learners' questions. The following four variables were thus incorporated into the analytical framework:

- 1) purposes of questioning
- 2) open-ended and closed questions
- 3) initiating questions vs. responding (follow-up) questions
- 4) questions used in the opening and closing parts of the conversation.

I provided the detailed description of these variables in section 6.2.2.

Social interaction strategies from politeness and e-learning theory

To address the research question “*how did learners establish relationship and establish interactional conventions*”, the categories for analyzing learners' skills of interaction were borrowed from two frameworks: Brown and Levinson's politeness

theory (1987) and Garrison and Anderson's (2003) construct of social presence in e-learning theory. The reason for adopting concepts from these two frameworks is because of their suitability for the type of data collected in this study. Particularly, the research followed Vinegre's (2008) method of using Brown and Levinson's framework for exploring learners' social interaction as Vinegre (2008) argued that the strategies mentioned in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory seemed to make a unique contribution to the construction of co-operative social interaction (Watts, 2003:47), which is exactly the focus of the analysis in this study. In addition to Brown and Levinson's framework, I also drew on Garrison & Anderson's framework of social presence in e-learning context. This framework is widely used in e-learning research (for example, Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Pawan et al, 2003), which is also the context of this study, and I found that some constructs in this framework can better represent the interactional strategies the learners have applied in this exchange, which Brown and Levinson's framework does not address.

Following the method of Conversation Analysis, I identified what the learners were doing in each turn of their conversation by referring to the interactional strategies constructed in the two above-mentioned frameworks. The identification of learners' interactional strategies then helped me interpret and compare how learners perceived their roles, negotiate the interactional convention and establish their relationship with their learning partners in the intercultural exchange.

"Interculturality" as a topic to explore

The initial stage of data analysis for the research question "*how did learners co-construct interculturality*" was to read through the data and find the sequences in which the concept of "interculturality" emerged in the communication. These sequences were then divided into two broad categories based on Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) theoretical framework of identities, which differentiates between two types of identities: *assumed identities* which are accepted and not negotiated (individuals are comfortable with these identities and not interested in contesting them) and *negotiable identities* which refer to all identity options which can be contested and resisted by particular individuals and groups. For the research purpose in Chapter

Seven, I adapted these two categories in my own terms – “assumed interculturality” and “negotiated/co-constructed interculturality”. The assumed interculturality refers to the well-known and accepted cultural differences (such as the ethnic, regional and national differences) between these learners while the negotiated interculturality was unknown territory between these learners before this exchange and was co-constructed in the process of their interaction. Based on these two categories, the researcher then re-analysed the chat data to investigate how the assumed interculturality was referred to by these learners in the conversation as well as how the negotiated interculturality was co-constructed. Following the method of CA, I identified the actions of these learners in each turn of their conversation so as to demonstrate the process of how the assumed interculturality was made relevant in the conversation to achieve certain purposes in the interaction and how the negotiated interculturality was jointly constructed by the learners in their conversation.

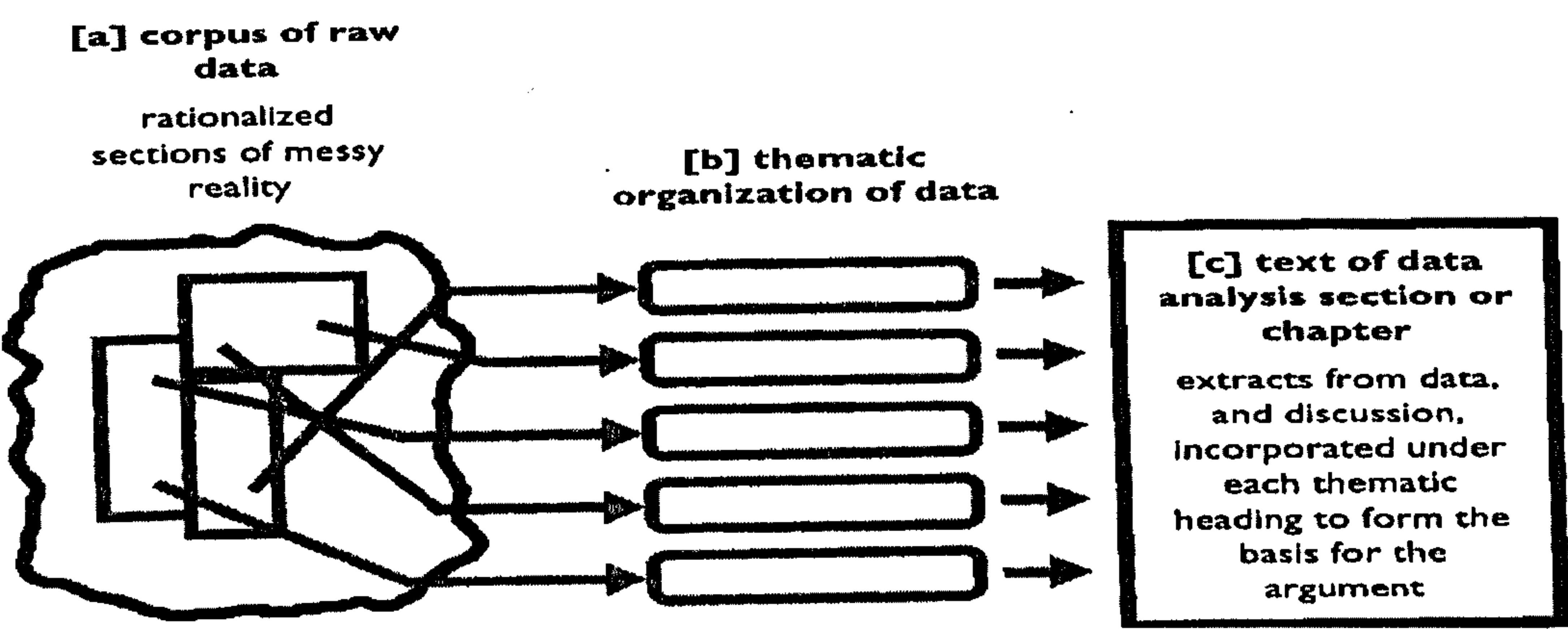
3.6.3 Grounded Approach

The data collected for the research question “*how did the instant messenger-mediated learning context influence the learner interaction*” were analyzed in a grounded approach to let the most salient issues emerge from the data (O’Dowd 2006, Warschauer 1999). The analysis was made through the following three steps:

- 1) I looked for answers to this question by examining the IM chat log, the content and the history pages of WIKIs and the field notes from participant observation.
- 2) I then triangulated my findings with data from student feedback collected through the project in order to ensure that my interpretation of the data was in agreement with that of the students. This student feedback data include their responses in the post-exchange structured interview, email and IM communication between the students and the researcher during the exchange and post-analysis member check with these students.
- 3) Representative examples are extracted from these data sources in order to illustrate the relevant issues and themes emerged from the data analysis.

The whole process of data analysis is a series of choices that shifted from their raw

state, or what Bogden & Biklen (1998:157-167) call “the rambling pages of description” (p.157), to a form that takes the “concrete relations and happenings observed in a particular setting to a higher level of abstraction” (p.167), and is aligned with Holliday’s (2002) suggestion about how to make the final arguments in a thesis through a thematic organization of data extracted from the original corpus of raw data, which is shown in the diagram below.



(Holliday, 2002, p.100)

3.6.4 Member check

One of the ways in which researchers can check their own subjectivity and ensure the trustworthiness of their findings is through member checking. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:314), “The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility”. In this study, member checking was conducted by sending the participants the findings and discussion I have constructed after data analysis and asking the participants to respond to the interpretation that I have made through data analysis and the writing process. The feedback provided by the participants not only enabled me to confirm the findings from original data analysis but also generated new insights toward data analysis.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Applied linguists often face a variety of conflicting interests and competing obligations. This section discusses the ethical issues raised in this study and my

response to these dilemmas and choices. Based on the BAAL recommendations (http://www.baal.org.uk/about_goodpractice_full.pdf) on good practice in applied linguistic research, the main ethical issue was identified as the responsibilities to the students and to the informants since participants in this research were not only the students in the online course but also informants in terms that they were asked to fill in questionnaires and that their WIKI pages and chat log were used as data for analysis.

In terms of the responsibilities to students, I have made sure that when students were being recruited, they were provided with the proper information on the nature and content of the course or program, the assumptions made about their previous knowledge and experience, and the level and type of study required from them. Also, the course was designed in a way that could be sensitive to the range of student backgrounds and equal opportunities of learning were provided for each student.

In terms of the responsibilities to the informants, I have made sure the participants have been informed about all aspects of the research that might reasonably be expected to affect their willingness to participate. The information was sent to the participants in the email communication I had with them, which covered the objectives of the research, its possible consequences, and issues of confidentiality and data security. Participants were also informed that they had a right to refuse to participate in research and to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, learners' answers to the questionnaires, their input on WIKI pages, the chat history and the discussion in the emails were treated as confidentiality and used only for research purposes. Participants' input was also kept anonymous in all phases of the study. The participants were given the right to get the data from their input at any time. The research findings will be shared with the participants. If they do not agree with what has been written about them, the researcher will negotiate with them to reach the mutual agreement on what is being written on this thesis.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed how I developed the four research questions (3.3) and chose the research strategies based on the features of these questions (3.4). I also

described the process of recruiting the participants (3.5.1) and presented the design and purpose of each step in the research procedure (3.5.2) as well as the data sources that I collected through the research procedure (3.5.3). I then explained how I decided the samples for analysis (3.6.1) and the methods as well as frameworks I adopted for conducting the analysis (3.6.2, 3.6.3, 3.6.4). In the next chapter, I presented the findings of Research Question One: the effects of IM-facilitated learning context in this study.

CHAPTER 4 IM-FACILITATED LEARNING CONTEXT

4.1 *Introduction*

This chapter provides an analysis of the effects that the instant messenger-mediated learning context brought to the intercultural exchange in this study. There are three purposes for providing such an analysis. First, it is hoped that the detailed description of the learning context can provide readers with sufficient background knowledge to better understand the subsequent chapters that explore the cultural dimension of foreign language learning in a technology-facilitated context. Second, it is hoped that findings regarding the technological application and its effect in this study can contribute to the relevant discussion in the other empirical studies of telecollaborative intercultural exchange (see 2.4.3). Last but not the least, it is hoped that the discussion of the technological dimension in this study can provide information and insights for potential practitioners of telecollaborative intercultural exchange when they design their courses.

The main technological tool used for learner communication in this study is instant messengers (IM). There are two reasons for adopting IM as the main communicative tool in this study. First of all, it was reported that IM has replaced emails as the most popular communication tools among young people (Thorne, 2003; Crystal, 2005) and, thus, it will benefit telecollaborative research if more studies can investigate how this popular tool among teenagers can be applied in educational settings. Secondly, the research focus of this study is on learners' "skills of discovery and interaction". From the reports of previous empirical studies (Thorne, 2003; O'Dowd, 2006), synchronous tools were found to be suitable for practicing these skills. However, no studies have been found that explore in detail how learners practice these skills on IM. Particularly, previous telecollaborative studies have generated rich findings on the use of asynchronous communication tools such as emails and discussion board in the intercultural exchange (2.4.4). However, few studies have researched the effects of synchronous tools such as IM or videoconferencing. With broadband internet access becoming more and more available and stable across countries worldwide, it can be expected that synchronous communication will have the potential to play more

important roles than before in educational settings.

The central question that this chapter aims to answer is:

What are the effects for learners of using instant messenger (IM) to practice “skills of discovery and interaction”?

There are four sub-questions under this central question:

- Did, and if so how, a learners’ technological background influence the exchange?
- What were the benefits of using IM?
- What were the drawbacks of using IM?
- How did the integration of IM with asynchronous tools work for the intercultural exchange in this study?

The findings related to these questions were generated from the analysis of the data collected from participant observation throughout the whole process of intercultural exchange (3.5.2), learners’ IM chat recordings, and learners’ feedback on the use of IM in the exchange in the post-exchange questionnaires. Section 4.2 below focuses on the learners’ technological backgrounds and its impact on their interactions. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 describe the benefits and problems of using IM respectively, with 4.5 exploring the effects of integrating IM with an asynchronous tool, Blackboard WIKI, in this study. Finally, section 4.6 offers a discussion of these findings.

4.2 Learners’ Technological Backgrounds and its Impact

4.2.1 Learners’ technological backgrounds

The survey on the technological backgrounds of the participants in this study showed that they all had the experience of using instant messengers before participating in the intercultural exchange of this study. MSN messenger appeared to be the most popular IM tool among the four commonly-used ones (MSN messenger, Yahoo messenger, Google Talk and Skype Chat) as shown in Figure 4.1. Eight out of the nine participants who provided their technological backgrounds in the survey had the experience of using MSN messenger for communicating with their friends while less

than half of the participants used the other three types of IM tool for communication.

collaborative studies (2.4.4). In the next section, I provide an example of the

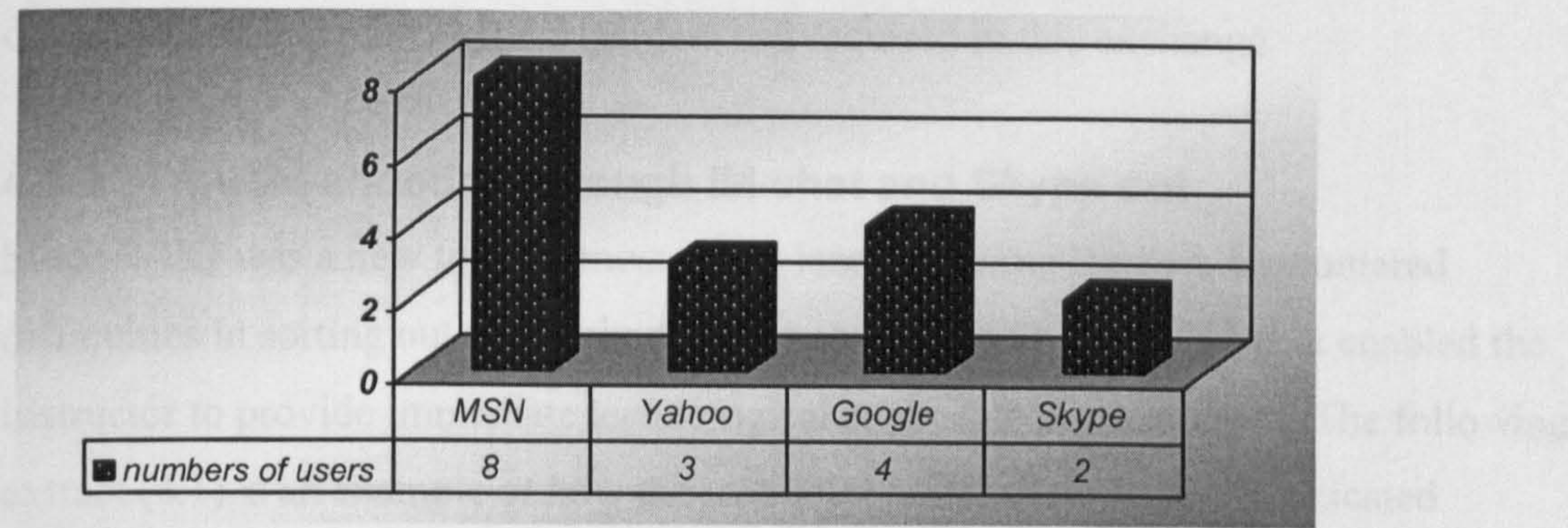


Figure 4.1 Popularity of IM Tools

The instructor provided some guidance in unit 2. In unit 2, the learners

MSN messenger was also named as their favourite IM software by most of the learners, mainly because they perceived this to be a more prevalent tool as most of their friends were using it and there are more emoticons available for them to play with. These learners normally used instant messengers to chat with their friends, keep in close contact with friends located in different places, share and send files, exchange information and serve as an alternative way to communicate with their friends if they cannot get through by call; all of these demonstrated that IM performed a significant function in maintaining students' social life.

Compared with the prevalence in the use of instant messengers, only one of the learners had the experience of using WIKI before the exchange, with that experience limited to a classroom assignment only. The learners did not really use WIKI for real communicative purposes in their life. In spite of this fact, most of the learners became acquainted with the methods of using WIKI quickly by reading the instruction guide composed by the researcher (see Appendix B).

Although it seemed, from the survey, that these learners had relatively similar experiences of using technologies for conducting their daily communication, my actual experience of working with them throughout the whole intercultural exchange and the observation of their chat recordings and WIKI pages showed that these learners possessed very different dispositions towards using technologies. These

differences seemed not to be related to their national backgrounds as found in other telecollaborative studies (2.4.4). In the next section, I provide an example of the different technological support learners had required in this exchange.

4.2.2 Trouble shooting through IM chat and Skype out

Since WIKI was a new tool for most of the learners, some learners encountered difficulties in sorting out the method of composing WIKI pages. IM chat enabled the instructor to provide immediate technological support to these learners. The following extract (4.1) is an example of how the instructor and the learner communicated through IM chat to sort out the problem. In turn 1, the learner actively initiated a negotiation with the instructor by stating the problem he faced when editing the WIKI page. The instructor provided some guidance in turn 2. In turn 3, the learner responded to demonstrate that he has figured out what the problem was. In turn 9, he initiated another sequence of negotiation by asking a hypothetical question to confirm his understanding. His problem in using WIKI pages was resolved after the two sequences of negotiation via IM chat.

Extract 4.1

1.	<i>Learner: i seem to be having a bit of problem with the WIKI page every time i add a new page, and save it, when i go back, my page isn't saved</i>
2.	<i>Instructor: really? so strange....did you click on the link and then edit that page? choose 'edit page' not 'new page'</i>
3.	<i>Learner: ah, i see, ok...thanks</i>
4.	<i>Instructor: i can try to find the pages you've typed before; would you like me to do that?</i>
5.	<i>Learner: no problems, it's worked now</i>
6.	<i>Instructor: ok</i>
7.	<i>Learner: I retyped it already anyway...now i just have to add the target culture</i>
8.	<i>Instructor: ok - thanks!</i>
9.	<i>Learner: if i want to add more info, do i still just edit the page, as opposed to adding a new one?</i>
10.	<i>Instructor: yep!</i>
11.	<i>Learner: ok, cool</i>
12.	<i>Instructor: :)</i>

In terms of using IM, because three out of the five pairs have resorted to their preferred tools (MSN messenger) for synchronous communication (see 4.2.3 for explanation), training became less an issue in terms of how to make use of the functions available in these IM tools for communication. Most learners were also

aware of the method of recording their chat log and extracting the chat log from the software. Only one participant required an individual tutorial from the instructor about the recording and extracting of the chat log. The instructor provided the tutorial in English firstly through IM chat in a similar way as demonstrated by extract 4.1 but failed this time to make the instruction understood by the learner through this mode. The instructor then relied on Skype voice chat in Mandarin Chinese to offer step-by-step guidance for this learner to get familiar with the function. The use of voice chat and the shift of language to learner's mother tongue made it more effective to get the message across to the learner.

The comparison of these two cases demonstrated learners' different needs for technological support. Young people nowadays grew up in a digital world. Their overall familiarity with computers does not mean that they also display similar dispositions towards adapting to a technology-facilitated learning environment. When being faced with new software, some learners can and may prefer to independently sort out the use of new tools; others may need a few hints and still others may need more guidance and help. In a class with small number of learners like this study, teachers can provide technological support according to the specific needs of each individual student. In a large-size class, peer scaffolding (4.2.4) may be needed for learners to search for technological support from other learners.

4.2.3 Different attitudes toward new software

There are many different online chat tools (as shown in 4.2.1) that could have been used for this exchange. Each one has its own strengths. Blackboard (the virtual learning environment available via the university) itself also offers chat function in its template. However, the instructor decided to use free downloadable IM software such as MSN, Yahoo Messenger and Google Talk for this exchange. The main reasons are 1) they are more commonly-used by young people, 2) they allow learners more freedom to express themselves in a multimodal and creative way, and 3) this approach minimises the constraints of using the university platform as will be discussed in 4.5.2. These features of the free downloadable software did bring benefits to the interaction in this exchange as will be discussed in the section 4.3.

Among the various types of IM software, the instructor favoured Google Talk at the beginning because of its integration of chat log with Google Email service, which can benefit the circulation of chat log for reflection and discussion purposes. However, the instructor became aware that the learners might have different preferences for using certain types of IM software. Although this study intended to adopt Google Talk as the medium for communication at the beginning, more than half of the participants chose other IM software for their communication at the end. It appeared that about half of the learners had a more open attitude towards using and trying Google Talk while two of them abandoned it when they encountered problems using it. Only two pairs of learners used Google Talk for the intercultural exchanges, as the other three pairs asked for the switch of IM software to either MSN messengers or Yahoo messengers mainly because of the difficulty of sorting out their problems with Google Talk, in addition to some participants' personal preferences for using a particular type of software with which they were more familiar.

4.2.4 Learner scaffolding

It was found that the more technologically-experienced learners were willing to help scaffold their partners' IT skill development. Most of the learners were also seen to scaffold with each other by communicating and discussing the use of these tools together. This demonstrated that the internet-mediated exchange project also provides ample opportunities for learners to develop their IT literacy through actually practicing using these tools and interacting with their partners. In the following, I will show i) how learners guided their peers to use particular software, ii) how they initiated negotiation on the meaning of the internet language, and iii) how some learners implicitly acquired new usage of internet language in the interaction.

Extract 4.2

1.	J: do you use podcasts?
2.	P: no.....or i don't know i don't know much about computer >"<
3.	J: it downloads a radio show from the internet onto your computer every time there is a new show no worries! http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/onemusic/huw/unsigned.shtml there are lots of songs in the middle, or on the right there is the podcast with a selection of different tracks
4.	P: i see i'm downloading a song right now!
5.	J: cool

Extract 4.2 is an example of how one of the learners in a pair introduced his learning pal how to make use of “podcasting service” for accessing music available online. In turn 3, the learner actively provided an explanation about what “podcasts” are and then attached a link to demonstrate what a “podcast service” actually looked like. In turn 4, his learning pal took up this advice and responded to show that she has learned how to use this service.

Another example is provided in extract 4.3 when C used an emoticon “@@” that T had not encountered before.

Extract 4.3

1.	C: @@
2.	T: ?
3.	C: Do you know the emtional icon?
4.	T: :-/
5.	T: but I don't see any emotional symbol. just get @@ for your message
6.	C: It means..."very complicated...I don't know what to do...

From this extract, we observe that T initiated a negotiation by typing a question mark in turn 2. C then explained what this emoticon meant in turn 6.

Sometimes, the acquisition of new usage in internet language was not made through explicit negotiation between learners as in this study learners were found to acquire new usage of internet language by adopting their learning pal’s different mode of expression. For example, at the beginning of their chat, P normally retyped the word again when she found she had misspelled that word in the previous sentence, as shown in below:

*P: i didn't visit Scoltland
Scotland*

In contrast, P’s learning pal, J, tended to use an asterisk to indicate his correction of misspelling in previous sentence as shown in the following:

*J: but in Scotland, Liberal Democrat Party is the seconf biggest
second

He kept using this mode of expression throughout his chat sessions with P. In the final chat session, we then observe P using J's usage in her expression (although she put the asterisk on a different side of the word) as shown in below:

*P: he's always telling us what to do and how we should do our works well
> __ < it's a nighmare
nightmare**

These examples demonstrated how learners appeared to support each other in using the software or new internet language expressions by explicit guidance and negotiation or implicit acquisition. The online intercultural exchange brought these learners opportunities to experience how people from different social or cultural groups made use of internet resources to express themselves in their own ways. The ability to help our interlocutors understand our cultural practices in a technology-facilitated communication context can be viewed as part of our intercultural communicative competence in the digital age (8.3.2).

4.3 Benefits of using IM for Interaction

4.3.1 Multimodal expressions

It was found that instant messengers facilitated these learners' interaction with each other by allowing them to present themselves through more multimodal expressions. In this study, the multimodal expressions include the use of emoticons in showing the speakers' feelings and the use of online satellite images, website links, online albums, audio music files and video resources available online. For example, C mentioned that:

Through emotional icons, participants can freely express their emotions though they cannot see their partners in person. (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-C, Q8)

For J,

Some obvious advantages of IM are flexibility, cost, and time. Also, the ability to send each other files and net links was useful. (Post-exchange Questionnaire, UK-J, Q8)

For these learners, instant messengers were not just a text-based medium of

communication. Through this medium, these learners were able to not only express their emotions through the emotional icons (e.g. 😊 😬 👍 😬) embedded in the IM software or some well-known internet language (e.g. lol = laugh out loud), but also introduce their own culture to their exchange partners by sending each other the MP3 files of their favorite music, pod-cast links to their favorite songs, website links to their personal blogs and online albums, video clips of traditional music, and satellite images of the tourist spot in their hometown. The following episode provides an example of how one of the learners made use of the satellite image service available online to help introduce his weekend plan when he went back to his hometown in Scotland.

Extract 4.4

1.	P: are you going anywhere special?
2.	J: maybe do some cycling ... hold on
3.	P: ok
4.	J: http://maps.google.co.uk/ and type “ardfern” you might need to zoom out a bit
5.	P: wow... are you going to the beach?
6.	J: umm, yeah, probably cycle down to the point it's very rocky
7.	P: i see
8.	J: there are practically no houses
9.	P: cycling, sounds fun!
10.	J: it's quite remote...and the sea is very violent

In responding to P’s question, J mentioned that he planned to go cycling to a place named “Ardfern”. In order to provide P with a more concrete idea about this place, in turn 4, J made use of satellite images available online through Google service to introduce this place. This strategy was successful in giving his interlocutor a very concrete understanding about the place he was interested in visiting during the weekend. He successfully got his messages about this place across to P, who asked further questions in turn 5 about J’s trip “wow...are you going to the beach?” according to the information transmitted through the satellite image as shown below.

4.3.2 More relaxing and less threatening

In this study, there is evidence that using IM instead of university-based chat rooms for learner communication created an informal learning context for intercultural exchange conducted in this study. Particularly, as IM were the tools these learners used every day to communicate with their peers, learning through communicating through IM appeared to be comfortable and less threatening to these learners. For example, J mentioned that:

The informal aspect of the assignment made me feel very comfortable in communicating with my partner. Perhaps if it had been in a more formal setting i wouldn't have been able to really communicate freely and say exactly what i felt - ie. it was much easier to say exactly what i thought rather than what i felt i should say. (Post-exchange Questionnaire, UK-J, Q7)

By saying this, J seemed to imply that sometimes in formal settings of education, he would say what he “should” or “was supposed to” say instead of what he really thought in his mind. In contrast, he reported that through a more informal learning medium such as IM, he felt he had been able to really communicate freely with his learning pals and this was related to the “authenticity” of learning as would be argued below (4.3.3). L stated that in the IM-mediated learning context,

“i do not feel it as a way of learning. it is non-threatening at all... ”(Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-L, Q7)

It seems that for L, formal learning in school institutions appears to carry the negative impression of “being threatening”. In contrast, the informal way of learning through IM chat has made him forget about the negative feelings accompanied with formal learning and enabled him to ‘learn’ in a non-threatening way. In a similar vein, P expressed that the informal learning context on IM has provided her more opportunities to learn than in formal educational settings:

“I feel more relaxed and learn more from this project than classroom learning.” (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-P, Q7)

It seems that for P, the relaxing feeling in an informal setting of learning like the IM chat did not mean that she would learn less; instead, she was able to learn more. P had this feeling maybe because, unlike classroom learning in which teachers normally structure the learning content, learners in this exchange had to be responsible for establishing their own learning mode with their interlocutors, which may have enabled them to release more of their agency in learning and to become more autonomous learners (Sercu, 2005).

4.3.3 Authenticity – Real-Life Conversation:

In the post-exchange questionnaires, most learners appreciated the facilitation of internet technologies that enabled them to transcend the boundary of distance to get to talk with ‘real’ people located far away from them, as U stated:

What I like is getting two people of different nationalities living in different parts of the world to talk. It's something that definitely can't be done in classrooms. (Post-exchange Questionnaire, UK-U, Q7)

For these learners, learning through talking synchronously online with other participants is “*informative*” (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-S, Q7) and much more “*interesting, interactive and real*” (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-C, Q7) than traditional classroom learning. It was found that when interacting via instant messengers, most of the learners started their chat sessions by exchanging with each other what was happening in their daily life before they went into more task-oriented discussion in the dialogue. In the chat, the learners normally showed their care about their exchange partners by asking greeting questions such as “how are you?” or “how is your day?” It appeared that most learners did not just provide brief and routine responses such as “fine, thanks” to these questions but shared their emotions and feelings with their exchange partners by telling the context of these emotions and feelings. For example, in the beginning of N & F’s fourth chat session (See data CD, Pair 3 – F&N, IM-4, turns 9-16), F mentioned that she felt tired because of helping her parents move things out of their company. This led to their following discussion in comparing the ways of running business in different countries. Similarly, in the beginning of J and P’s fourth chat session (See data CD, Pair 2 – P&J, IM-4, turns 1-16), J mentioned that on his way to the university earlier on that day, he was surprised

by a large crowd of people and police outside a main building of the university. He then realized that it was because Tony Blair, the Prime Minister at that time, was giving a speech in the Law Faculty and the large crowd of people were the student protesters who were angry about the war in Iraq. This prompted his exchange partner, P, to ask a probing question “what do you think of the war?” This question then led to their exchange of views on wars and politics as well as the comparison of students’ attitudes toward politics in each other’s country.

These real-life episodes were constructed by these learners naturally in their process of socializing with their exchange partners and covered many different aspects of these learners’ lives – food, music, films, sports, travelling, family, business and politics etc. They became another window for these learners to have a glimpse of their exchange partners’ ways of life and served as important sources for these learners’ framing of exchange topics. Although the design of this study required these learners to find their exchange topics by reading their interlocutors’ input on the WIKI pages, these learners seemed to prefer the impromptu ways of constructing exchange topics through the synchronous interaction with their learning pals as demonstrated above.

4.3.4 Instant turn-taking

The instant turn-taking feature (Ware, 2003) of IM requires immediate responses from each side of the interlocutor in order to maintain the natural flow of the conversation. Consequently, it facilitated learners’ interaction in this study in the way that learners were able to adjust their communicative styles by initiating immediate negotiation and repair of the confused or unclear points in the process of communication (5.6.3). The instant turn-taking feature also facilitated learners’ discovery process in the way that learners appeared to respond to most of the questions proposed by their interlocutors (6.4.4). In asynchronous discussion board, however, learners can easily ignore any questions that they do not want to answer. In addition, learners were able to ask immediate responding questions to clarify or confirm their interpretation of the questions initiated by their interlocutors. Therefore, they were able to provide more precise information that their interlocutors needed.

4.4 Problems in using IM

In spite of the above-mentioned benefits of instant messengers, some potential problems were also found in the use of this medium, three of which are explained below in relation to 1) instability of internet service, 2) learners' forgetting of exchange time, and 3) limitedness of expression.

4.4.1 Instability of internet service

The synchronous feature of communication has made the occasional instability of internet service a bigger challenge for the practitioners of online intercultural exchanges. In asynchronous communication, learners can work at their own paces and do not need to be present online simultaneously so the instability of internet does not really affect learners' interaction in a direct way. However, it can be a very troubling issue in synchronous communication as J stated in the following:

Occasionally the time delay between dialogue inputs caused some confusion but i think we both learnt to accommodate the delay. (Post-exchange Questionnaire, UK-J, Q1)

Although, according to J, he and his exchange partner have learnt to accommodate the time delay caused by the instability of the internet, the same situation could cause communication difficulties to other pairs and reduce learners' motivation in participating in the intercultural exchange.

4.4.2 Learners' problem

Another drawback of using IM also relates to its synchronous feature. Since the date and time for each IM chat session had to be pre-arranged so that both learners could be online at the same time for synchronous conversation, a problem occurred when one member of the pair forgot or misremembered the arranged time for the chat. This situation unfortunately happened to one pair of learners in this study and was fortunately solved by the instructor's emergent internet phone call through Skype from the UK to Taiwan to inform the participant about her prearranged chat session. This experience may suggest that for intercultural exchanges that rely on synchronous tools for learner communication, it is important for instructors to keep a record about how to contact their learners through a mobile device when such scenarios happen so

as to minimise one of the potential problems embedded in this type of exchange.

4.4.3 Limitedness of expression

Although more than half of the learners have acknowledged the more interesting, interactive and real features of IM interaction, they still commented on the limitations of this medium such as the problem of using emotional icons and the lack of visual expressions. For example, although emotional icons were used for learners to express their feelings, C stated that:

I doubt whether they (emotional icons) can truly, earnestly express their bitterness and joy through emoticons. They still limited. (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-C, Q8)

For C, emotional icons, though being helpful in expressing feelings, were still limited to express their emotions fully. Other learners also made similar comments by mentioning that the lack of visual expression of IM made it harder to convey certain messages and impossible to emphasize some points by gesture expressions. For L, IM was not considered effective enough if compared with face-to-face communication as he stated:

Lots of communicative devices such as intonation and nonverbal features can make face-to-face communication more efficient. (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-L, Q8)

S made a similar statement and added that the lack of visual images in IM communication could take away some potential opportunities to learn about the way people from different cultures express themselves in a non-linguistic way:

Body language and prosodic information in spoken language often have more implications than words. If I talked with U face-to-face, I probably can learn more about some specific ways Thai people express themselves. (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-S, Q8)

With similar concerns, some other learners mentioned that they would prefer to do face-to-face or verbal exchanges so that there are no limitations in using body language or other paralinguistic devices to understand and enhance the interaction.

These learners also suggested that using Skype or videoconferencing might be a solution to this problem although they were also aware that using these tools might result in more technical problems to handle with.

4.5 Using IM in combination with Blackboard WIKI

The use of synchronous IM chat was integrated with the use of asynchronous tool, Blackboard WIKI, in this study. Findings of this study suggested that these two different types of communicative mediums seemed to play complimentary roles in this exchange. In addition, the various functions embedded within WIKI software made it a seemingly more ideal asynchronous tool to use when compared with other tools such as emails or discussion boards. In spite of these benefits, some problems such as the lack of flexibility in its fixed template, constraint from the university and the influence from occasional technological breakdown were also identified about the problems of using Blackboard WIKI in the exchange.

4.5.1 Complimentary roles of WIKI

It was found that WIKI offered another space for these learners to provide a more detailed introduction of their own cultures to their exchange partners. They also demonstrated different styles of making use of the functions embedded in WIKI software. For example, N tried to introduce himself in Mandarin Chinese in this platform while C attached images to her pages, which added a vivid effect to the originally text-based expression. J and T used the “link” function to extend their self-introduction by providing net links that contain more information about their lives or hometowns for their interlocutors.

Figure 4.2 shows how the website link provided by J led his audience to experience his music world including the photo of his band and the acoustic demonstration of their performance.

Figure 4.2 J's WIKI Page

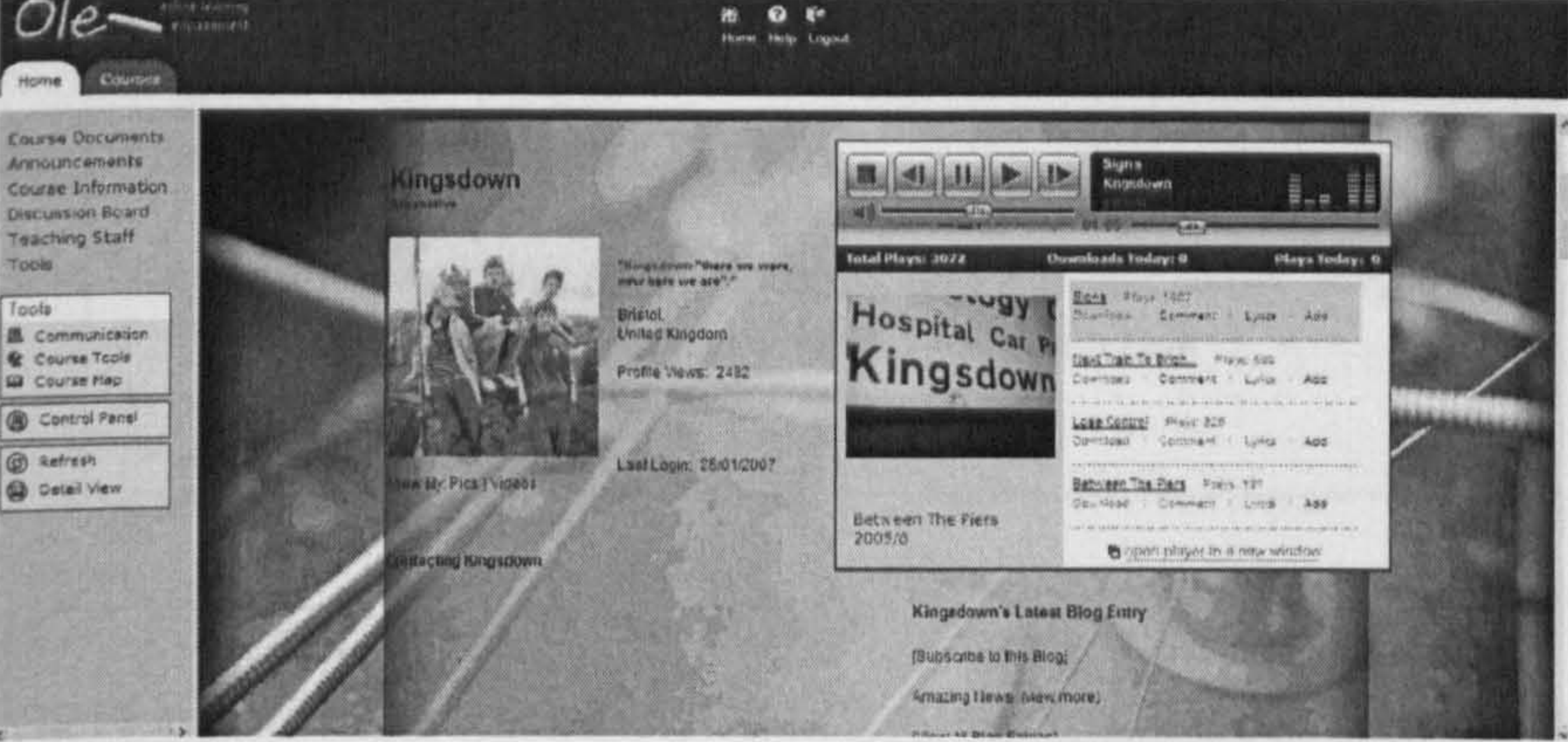
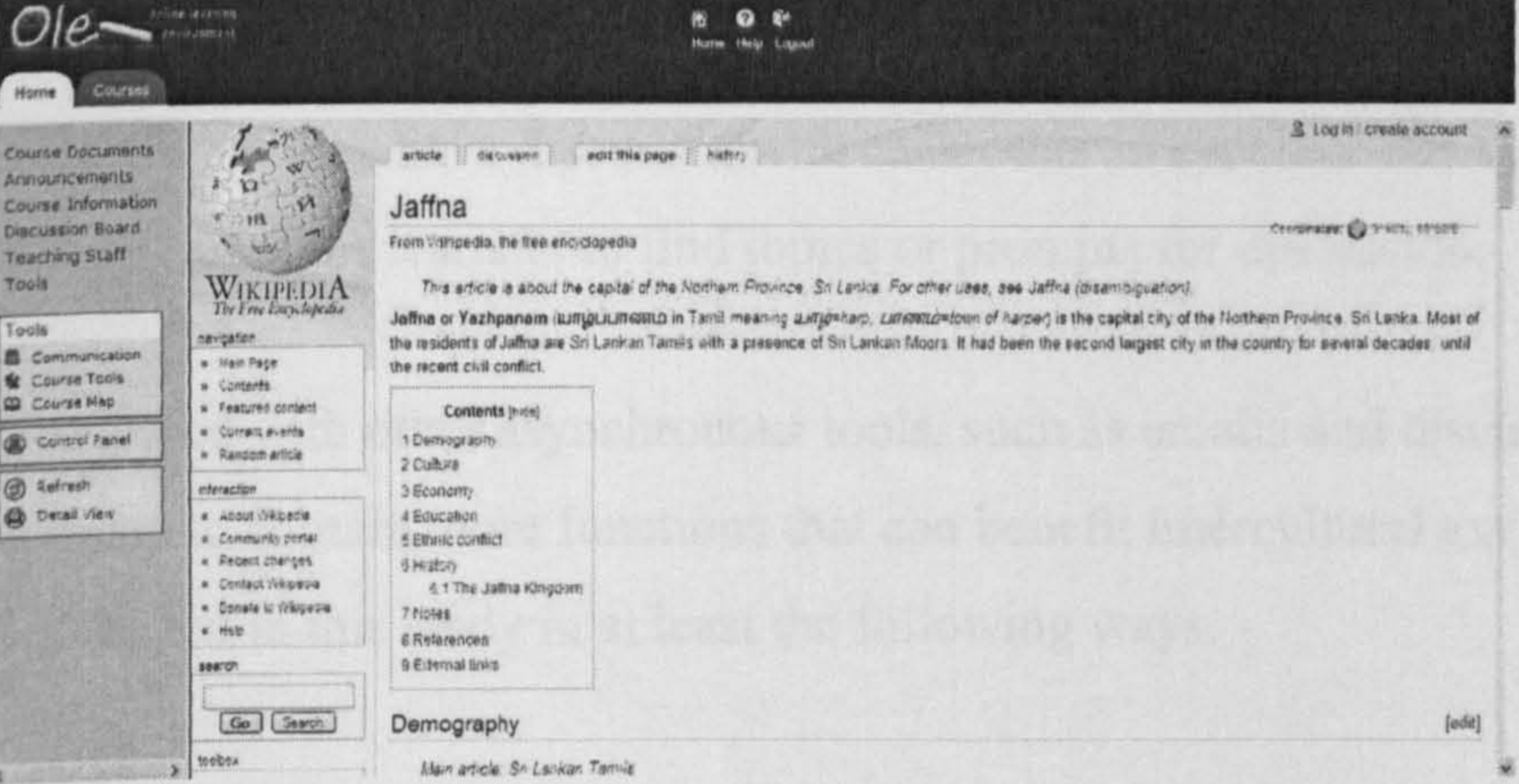


Figure 4.3 in below shows how T made use of the Wikipedia link (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>) to let his audience understand his hometown “Jaffna”.

Figure 4.3 T's WIKI page



The content of these learners' chat also demonstrated that when they needed to exchange more complicated information, they would suggest doing this via WIKI instead of talking online. This fact may support the finding that asynchronous mediums could have the potential of facilitating more in-depth discussions and allowing learners more time to compose and organize their thoughts and ideas (2.4.4). Extract 4.5 on the next page is an example of how one of the learners suggested making use of WIKI for introducing longer and more complicated information, as expressed in turn 4 below.

Extract 4.5

1.	J: is it easy to visit there? i don't really understand the relations between the countries my apologies for that
2.	P: no need to appologize it's really complicated
3.	J: i did some reading on the internet and it didn't really help!
4.	P: i'll explain the history in my WIKI after the talk
5.	J: ok, that's a good idea
6.	P: it's quite a long story

There are also examples in the data that showed learners formed their questions based on the information their partners have mentioned on their WIKI pages. For example,

T: In your WIKI page, you said "the narrative language of movies and actual texts are quite different". What does that mean? (Pair 1 – C&T, IM-2, turn 74)

This provides evidence that the WIKI platform was not only used by the learners to reflect what they have discussed with each other in synchronous chat but also served as a resource for learners to find topics or prompts for discussion.

Compared with other asynchronous tools, such as emails and discussion boards, WIKI appears to contain more functions that can benefit intercultural exchanges like the one conducted in this study in at least the following ways.

- 1) It allows users to create and edit a webpage online without the need of HTML knowledge so it can be learnt easily
- 2) It keeps a historical record of every step of change users make to the page. In the educational context, teachers can make use of this to track the developmental process of learners’ knowledge build-up. For researchers, this provides resources for understanding how learners change in the process of interaction.
- 3) It allows every registered member to edit every page on the website so learners can have access to and edit their peers’ webpage as long as they log into the website. This function enables the co-construction of knowledge among learners and enables the more able learners or the teacher to help correct other learners’ linguistic errors.

4) It combines the 'discuss' function in each page so learners can leave comments for their peers to communicate why they make the changes; further discussion or negotiation of meaning can thus be motivated.

In spite of these benefits, some problems still need to be resolved when using WIKI service provided by Blackboard virtual learning environment, as discussed in the next section.

4.5.2 Problems of using Blackboard WIKI

As Bauer et al (2006) evidenced, the use of Blackboard, the course management system offered by the university, had eased the work on course website construction. Compared to my previous experience in designing and conducting a web-based reading courseware for secondary school students about eight years ago, the construction of a similar web-based interactive course nowadays is no longer a task that requires specific technological training and knowledge but something as user-friendly as using the word processing software installed in the computer. However, the trade-off of the convenience in using Blackboard is that it has a fixed template for generating these courses, thereby lacking in the flexibility and creativity web designers can have if they create the websites by using other web authoring tools. In addition, Blackboard is not free. Normally, only larger institutions, such as universities and business corpora, can afford to purchase, host and maintain such a Course Management System suit for their use. It is not designed for individual users. In other words, if the institutions do not have the system installed, the individual users will not be able to make use of the system, either.

Two other factors also increased the complexity and difficulty of using Blackboard from the experience of using it for this study. First, only the registered students of the university are the default users of this course system. For a telecollaborative project such as this one to be conducted, the course designer needs to communicate further with the system administrator in order to register the participants who are not the registered students of the university. The process of communicating and making this done depends on the efficiency of the administrative system so it is not completely under the course designer's control. Secondly, the occasional university IT service

breakdown due to maintenance or technological problems can interfere with the smooth delivery of the pre-scheduled sessions of synchronous chat, as happened in the case of one of the pairs in this study who were not able to work on their Blackboard WIKI pages before two of their chat sessions. Eventually, they resorted to using emails as an alternative tool for writing down their reflections, which added an extra burden for all the relevant participants because they needed to spend extra time communicating and liaising about these sudden changes.

4.6 Discussion

4.6.1 Learner Agency in IM-mediated Learning Context

Pillay et al (2006) mentioned that individuals may engage with learning tasks in particular ways because of the reciprocal effect associated with the artifacts embedded in an environment. They used the term “learning agency” to describe the effect on learning of the knowledge designed and available within a learning context, and which acts to shape how learners engage in and with that context. Pillay et al (ibid) argued that the concept of “agency” in educational contexts has focused almost exclusively on the individual as the locus of agency, ignoring the potential and complexity of the environment as a significant contributor. To derive a more holistic understanding of learner engagement in a technology-facilitated learning environment, Pillay et al (ibid) suggested that it is essential to consider not only the learners’ self-efficacy (agency) but also the “learning agency” inherent in the factors that make up the learning context.

Findings in this chapter have demonstrated clearly the learning agency embedded in an instant messenger-mediated learning environment. For example, learners were found to actively socialise with each other (4.3.3), make use of multimodal ways to express themselves (4.3.1), and scaffold with each other on the usage of new software and internet language (4.2.4). Similar to Jin and Erben’s (2007) findings (2.4.4), the participants in this study perceived IM to provide a less threatening context for learning (4.3.2) and provide a more private space for them to learn. The findings demonstrated that learners felt less pressured and less constrained under an IM-mediated learning context. When learners were given more freedom and choice in their learning, they appeared to release more agency towards being responsible for

their own learning. This was demonstrated by their autonomous adoption and adaptation of different online resources provided by Web2.0 internet service for multimodal expression of their own identities, their autonomous scaffolding with each other in the use of different internet technologies and their active social engagement with their interlocutors to establish and maintain good relationship with them. It appeared that in synchronous mediums such as IM, learners invested more time in socializing with each other so as to keep the conversation proceeding in a natural way while in asynchronous mediums, learners actually worked at their own pace when they composed the messages which they then posted online. In asynchronous communication, learners could keep posting messages no matter whether their exchange partners responded to their posted messages or not. Like Thorne (2003) argued, IM facilitates real conversation while e-mail supports “a sequenced set of responsive monologues” rather than “dialogic interaction”.

Thorne (2003) argued that ‘authenticity’ of learning tasks is a process rather than a product, which means authenticity is not something that is ‘ready-made’ in the educational settings for learners to use but derives from learners’ ‘enactment of agency’ in their process of learning. As Van Lier (1996:13, cited in Thorne, 2003) stated, language activity is authentic when “it realizes a free choice and is an expression of what a person genuinely feels and believes” and is “intrinsically motivated.” In this study, it is argued that evidence has been captured to support the view that the real-life like conversation facilitated by IM enabled authentic interactive dialogue between these learners. Learner agency was present in the dialogue in the way that these learners actively made use of the resources available in the environment to help express themselves and built up a good personal relationship with their exchange partners in order to make the conversation proceed in a meaningful manner. This supports Wegerif’s (1998) proposal that success or failure in on-line education depended on participants’ construction of a space of engagement through which they could position themselves as insiders with a vested interest in the educational, social, and communicative activities at hand. This also echoes Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), a developmental model contending that participants move from initially peripheral and tentative

engagement to full participation in a community of practice over time.

4.6.2 Individual-based Difference in Technological Background

Unlike previous studies (Belz, 2002; Thorne, 2003; Ware, 2005) that have reported a significant digital divide between students from different countries, the findings from my study show that the differences in learners' technological backgrounds were not determined nationally in anyway but resided in the individual research participants. In other words, they were related to the participants' personal trajectory of using technological tools. It seems that with the recent rapid IT development across countries worldwide, the obvious and sharp contrast in learners' experiences with and access to internet technologies as reported by the previous studies is less a problem in similar intercultural exchanges now. An individual-based difference in technological backgrounds and habits of usage has replaced the nationally-based digital divide. Learners can be more experienced in using technologies in countries with more advanced technological development; however, factors such as age, gender, social and economic background, personality, and professions etc can all be possible reasons that contribute to the different styles and abilities in using technology. Telecollaborative teachers may need to identify the specific needs and disposition of each student so as to provide useful support for them. In addition, a more personal-oriented learning environment (8.4) may be a demand for the future e-learning environment in order to accommodate different user styles in the online platform – for example, which IM software they prefer to use, what language they are used to for communication, which search engine they are used to work on.

4.6.3 The Role of Asynchronous Tools

Similar to O'Dowd's (2006) findings, students in this study preferred to communicate with each other through the quick-in-response synchronous IM tools; yet they resorted to the asynchronous tool (WIKI in this study) when they needed to provide deeper and more detailed and nuanced cultural information for their learning pals, as evidenced in extract 4.5 above. This fact indicated that synchronous and asynchronous tools can serve different purposes in the telecollaborative exchange. Even different synchronous tools may provide different effects. For example, although the communication via instant messengers is real-time, the users do not really see each other face-to-face.

This feature may make the real-time communication less intimidating for some learners, particularly when they first meet their exchange partners. However, as the findings in this chapter indicated (4.4.3), most learners still suggest that “real” and “face-to-face” interaction through videoconferencing or Skype may help them understand their interlocutors more. In other words, the differences that exist between each tool do not mean that we can say which tool is ‘better’ or which is ‘worse’. Rather, these differences may make each tool suitable for different occasions and purposes of learning. As O’Dowd (2006) argued, purely relying on one particular mode of communication is to reduce the versatile capacities that current internet technologies are ready to offer. Teachers need to evaluate different variables such as task types and learner orientations when deciding what tools to use in their intercultural exchange projects.

4.7 Conclusion

The findings in this chapter have demonstrated that the IM-mediated learning context appeared to encourage learners’ active engagement (Ware, 2003) in their intercultural exchange with their learning partners. The synchronous feature of IM makes socialisation a natural part of interaction as indicated in 4.3.3. In addition, its instant turn-taking feature appeared to facilitate learners’ interaction and the process of discovery (4.3.4). These seemed to suggest that IM could be an ideal platform for learners to practice the skills of discovery and interaction in the intercultural exchange in terms of the “learning agency” embedded within it.

After providing readers an understanding of the situated learning context within which these learners were having the intercultural dialogue with each other, in the following chapters, a fine-grained discourse analysis on these learners’ dialogue with a focus on their “skills of discovery and interaction” will be revealed.

CHAPTER 5 NEGOTIATING INTERACTIONAL CONVENTIONS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, it was argued that one of the features that distinguishes “intercultural communicative competence” from “communicative competence” is its emphasis on the “establishment and maintenance of human relationship” (that is, socialisation) in communication in addition to the effective exchange of information (2.3.2). In Chapter Four, I identified that IM-mediated learning context facilitated learners’ agency in socialising with their interlocutors (4.3.3). The “authenticity” embedded in the IM-mediated learning context made socialisation (the establishment and maintenance of relationship with each other) an indispensable part in learners’ interaction in their process of discovering (Chapter Six) and co-constructing (Chapter Seven) new cultural understandings with their interlocutors. Therefore, before discussing the process of discovery and co-construction of cultural meanings, in this chapter, I analyzed and report below how learners socially interacted with each other and negotiated a mutually accepted communicative style with each other.

Byram (1997) described “interaction” as a very complicated process, which requires the learners to “draw upon their existing knowledge, have attitudes which sustain sensitivity to others with sometimes radically different origins and identities and operate the skills of discovery and interpretation.” He argued that “skills of interaction” requires the ability to manage the constraints in ‘particular’ circumstances with ‘specific’ interlocutors (my emphasis). One important objective for the skills of interaction raised by Byram is the ability to negotiate agreement on conventions of interaction for a specific occasion, which means

The intercultural speaker can use their knowledge of conventions of interaction (of conversational structures; of formal communication such as presentations; of written correspondence; of business meetings; of informal gatherings etc.) to establish agreed procedures on specific occasions, which may be a combination of conventions from the different cultural systems present in the interaction. (1997:62)

Take the intercultural exchange conducted in this study as an example. Since these learners did not know each other before, in the process of getting to know each other

in the conversation, one thing they needed to do (but they may not be aware of their doing it) is that they have to negotiate a way of communication between themselves, which may include making explicit to their interlocutor their interpretations of and expectations toward this exchange so as to establish with their interlocutors a mutually comfortable way of talking to each other under this particular context. According to Byram (1997), under such circumstances, conventions from different cultural systems may co-present in the interaction. When the participants are with very different cultural backgrounds, the difficulty of negotiating interactional conventions can be increased with the potential for more variables to interfere with the smooth proceeding of the conversation. This chapter thus aims to explore whether different communication styles existed among these learners and if they did exist, what were the differences and how these learners negotiated their interactional conventions.

The research questions and analytical constructs are discussed below in section 5.2. The analytical constructs include the operationalisation of social interaction, reciprocity in the interaction and two communication styles. Sections 5.3 and 5.4 are fine-grained analysis on two pairs of learners' interaction. The summary of findings from the analysis is provided in section 5.5, which is followed by a discussion in 5.6.

5.2 Research Questions and Analytical Constructs

5.2.1 Research Questions

The main research question in this chapter is: *“How did learners establish relationships and negotiate interactional conventions in their intercultural exchange?”* There are three sub-questions under this main question:

1. How did the learners use interactional strategies to establish relationships with each other in this exchange?
2. Were there any differences in their communication styles?
3. If there were differences, how did these learners negotiate their communication styles?

In order to draw a picture of how these learners actually interact with each other and find out what differences exist in the way they interact, I conducted a micro analysis

of the chat data of two selected pairs of the learners (see 3.6.2 for the principles of selection). Some of their input in their WIKI pages and the post-exchange structured interview were adopted to support or explain what have been observed in the chat data.

5.2.2 Operationalisation of social interaction

The categories for analyzing social interactional strategies in this study were derived through the grounded analysis of learners' chat data by adapting concepts proposed by Garrison and Anderson's (2003) framework of social presence in an e-learning context and Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of politeness in face-to-face communication. Garrison and Anderson's (2003) framework of social presence is widely used for analyzing learners' social interaction in the e-learning context.

Although this framework provides good reference for me to understand the strategies being used by the learners for social interaction, it was not able to provide a full account of all the interactional strategies that were present in my learners' chat data. The possible reason can be that their framework was constructed mainly on the data from asynchronous CMC while my data were mainly collected from synchronous CMC. The synchronous IM chat, though in a written form, is reported to demonstrate the features of "oral" form of communication because of its being "real-time" in nature while asynchronous communication purely relies on "written" communication. The interactional strategies used in the more oral-like synchronous communication can be very different from the asynchronous communication that is primarily written-based. Because of the differences in the mediums, I found many strategies mentioned within Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework of politeness, which is constructed on the basis of face to face communication, a very good supplement to Garrison and Anderson's categories for the analysis of my data.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory revolves around the concept of face, which is defined as the public self-image that all competent adult members of society have and seek to claim for themselves (Vinegre, 2008). Politeness strategies are used by the speakers to eliminate or reduce the possible face-threatening acts which might be caused by their utterances to their hearers. For example, in the online intercultural exchange, to initiate the ending of a conversation contains possible threat to the

hearers' face because it may make the hearer feel that the speaker does not enjoy the current conversation. Therefore, it is common for the speaker to use certain politeness strategies such as giving reasons to explain the actions or self-disclosing (see Table 5.1) to reduce the possible face-threatening effect caused by their initiation to end the conversation.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the self-image consists of two related aspects: negative face and positive face. Our needs for positive face come from our desire to be appreciated and approved of, i.e. the desire to be wanted while our needs for negative face stem from our desire for freedom of action and freedom from imposition, i.e. the desire for freedom from impingement by others. Between friends with lower social and power distance, the need for positive face is more significant than the need for negative face. However, the need for negative face is more dominant when the social or power distance between the interlocutors is high.

Negative politeness is at the heart of respect behaviour (respect the hearer's privacy and space), just as positive politeness is the kernel of 'familiar' and 'joking' behaviour (the need to feel involved and connected). Appendix D and Appendix E list the positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies mentioned in Brown and Levinson's framework. If we compare Garrison and Anderson's framework (Appendix F) to the politeness theory, we can find that Garrison and Anderson's framework of social presence mainly focus on positive politeness strategies – that is, the strategies learners use to shorten the distance between them. However, negative politeness strategy is equally important in the social interaction in e-learning context. Especially when these students meet each other for the first time, they might choose to respect the other's privacy and space in the first encounters. Brown and Levinson's framework of politeness strategies appear to be able to provide a more complete explanation for the learners' behaviours in social interaction observed in the intercultural exchange.

The categorical framework used in this study followed Brown and Levinson's dichotomy: "positive politeness" and "negative politeness." However, the strategies under each type of politeness have been adjusted according to the features of the chat

data collected in this study. Particularly, two categories (expressing emotions and self-disclosure) which were extracted from Garrison and Anderson’s framework of social presence have been added to the list of positive politeness strategies because they were found to be used frequently by the learners in this study. Table 5.1 provides the definitions of these developed and adapted categories. Following Vinegre’s (2008) conventions, each positive politeness strategy is represented by the capitalized letter P with a surplus symbol and its number like P+1 or P+2.

Table 5.1 Categories for analysis

	Title	Definition
NEGATIVE POLITENESS		
P-1	Minimizing imposition	Minimize the imposition (respect the other’s time, space, privacy)
P-2	Not assuming	Not assume, give freedom of choice (by being indirect, using questions or hedge)
P-3	Apologizing	Apologize about causing inconvenience to others (e.g. intruding the other’s rights)
POSITIVE POLITENESS		
P+1	Expressing emotions	Expressions of speaker’s emotions (Speaker makes the self transparent.)
P+2	Self-disclosure	Self-disclosure (expressing inner thoughts and ideas) (Speaker makes the self transparent.)
P+3	Using humour	Use of jokes or humour
P+4	Phatics expression	Use phatics expression (greeting question, give wishes) (Speaker invites Hearer to share, showing interest in knowing about the hearer’s personal life)
P+5	Showing concerns	Show concerns, sympathy, understanding (Speaker asserting knowledge of and concern for Hearer’s wants)
P+6	Being supportive	Being optimistic, supportive, and encouraging, giving emotional support
P+7	Giving reasons	Give reasons to explain actions
P+8	Inclusive markers	Use vocative or inclusive expressions (use “we” and “our”, call names etc) (Speaker makes Hearer feel involved)
P+9	Being cooperative	Expressing agreement, cooperation, avoid disagreement (Speaker makes Hearer feel being accepted)
P+10	Complimenting or appreciating	Complimenting and expressing appreciation (Speaker make Hearer feel being liked)
P+11	Showing interest	Show attention or even use exaggerated expression to emphasize the interest

In like fashion, each negative politeness strategy is represented in a similar way but

with a minus symbol like P-1 or P-2. In the analysis of data in sections 5.3 and 5.4, for convenience's sake, I marked which strategy is used by the learners by putting the symbols in a bracket after the description of the strategies.

One thing to note is that these categories were derived from the analysis of the learners' opening and closing parts of conversation (5.2.5) in the chat data collected in this study. Therefore, they are open to further operationalisation and modification when more data sets are taken into consideration (8.6).

5.2.3 Reciprocity in the interaction

Another important concept that this study adopts to analyze learners' interaction is the 'reciprocity' in the communication. In the process of data analysis, I found that 'reciprocity' has played a significant role for these learners to negotiate their interactional conventions. Reciprocity, according to Burgoon et al (1993), is one of the means by which interactants adjust their communication style to one another during an interchange. They defined "*interpersonal reciprocity*" as the process of behavioral adaptation in which one responds, in a similar direction, to a partner's behaviors with behaviors of comparable functional value. In contrast to "*interpersonal reciprocity*" is "*interpersonal compensation*", in which one responds with behaviors of comparable functional value but in the opposite direction. Comparable functional value means that both people's behaviour relates to the same basic communication function such as dominance, involvement, composure, or rapport.

5.2.4 Communication styles

Communication styles can be defined according to different parameters; for example, systematic vs. organic, direct vs. diplomatic, inductive vs. deductive etc (Utley, 2004). This study, following Ware's (2003) terminology, distinguished between two communication styles: 'task-oriented' vs. 'personal-oriented'. The reason for choosing these two styles is because in the process of data analysis, I found the learners in this study exhibited these two different styles of interaction. The task-oriented style of communication focuses on 'getting things done' efficiently so less time is spent on developing deeper interpersonal relationships with each other. The personal-oriented style of communication is less concerned with getting things done,

but more interested in building and maintaining good relationships with people and ensuring others are comfortable with the interactions. They are not mutually exclusive and during a conversation, people may shift from one to the other, although people have a tendency to go one way or another.

5.2.5 Selection of Data

Following what Ware (2003) has done in her study, I distinguished these learners' chat content into two types: 1) the part of chat that mainly serves to manage the flow of the conversation (including starting the conversation, ending the conversation and maintaining the conversation in the middle) and 2) the part of chat that focuses mainly on the exploration and discussion of each other's cultural information, which is the main task required in the exchange. Learners' social interaction has played a major role in the first type of chat content. Various strategies were found being used by these learners to start, maintain and end their conversation. The stylistic differences were especially salient in the opening and closing parts of their conversations. In this chapter, the focus is therefore put on the analysis of the opening and closing parts of two pairs' conversation and findings are drawn from the analysis to support my argument in section 5.6.

I define that the opening part of a conversation “starts from the very beginning of a conversation and ends when there is a clear move in the conversation that suggests or prompts the speaker and his or her interlocutor to shift into intercultural exploration”. For example, turn 4 and turn 5 in the following chat episode between C & T indicate a clear move from the opening of their conversation to the discussion of the main task in their intercultural dialogue.

1. C: Hey, shall we start?
 2. T: yes, how are you
 3. C: couldn't be better. Thanks
 4. C: May I start first?
 5. T: go on
- (C&T, IM-4)

The closing part of a conversation is defined as “starting when there is a clear move in the conversation that initiate the end of a chat session and lasting until these learners

bid farewell”. For example, turn 154 in the following chat episode between F & N indicates a clear move that initiates the end of their chat session.

154. N: shall we call it a day?
155. F: sure.
156. N: been nice chatting to you again.
157. F: same here.
158. F: next time on 6/27, right?
159. N: I think so...or is it 25? Lemme quickly check
160. F: ohhh. Yeap you are right.
161. N: yeah 25.
162. F: see you then.
163. N: ok, cool, later.
(F&N, IM-2)

The main body of the exchange is between the opening part and the closing part of the conversations. Social interaction is especially salient in the opening and closing parts of the conversation but it is equally important in maintaining the conversation in the main body.

In sections 5.3 and 5.4, I demonstrate the different interactional patterns exhibited in the dialogue of two pairs of learners by comparing the openings and closings in one pair’s chat sessions with those in another pair’s.

5.3 *Pair One (C&T)*

The two learners in pair one are C and T. C was a third-year English-major student in a university in southern Taiwan. T was originally from Sri Lanka; he got his bachelor degree from a UK university and has been an engineer in a university in the UK after he got the degree. He registered in a Mandarin Chinese course provided by the city council in the place where he worked. The following is the opening of C and T’s first chat session.

Episode 5.1: C&T, IM-1 (Opening)

1. C: Hello, I am C. Shall we start?
2. T: Hello, of course.
3. T: just composing my WIKI page,
4. T: I've post few paragraphs, hopefully complete it by today
5. C: Yeah
6. T: sorry, I didn't have enough time for that.
7. T: so you know very little about my culture...

In C and T's first chat session, C opened the conversation with a brief greeting and self introduction followed by a question that requested her interlocutor's opinion about the start of the chat. She used the auxiliary verb "shall" to perform the speech act, which could be viewed as a type of negative politeness strategy. By using a question to request the start of the conversation (P-2), she has given her interlocutor the option of choosing not to do what she proposed. In other words, she was not assuming that her interlocutor would definitely accept her request. However, she also adopted positive politeness strategy (P+8) by using the inclusive pronoun "we" in the request, which is a way of showing that they are co-operators in the exchange. T replied with a quick greeting and used the phrase "of course" as a response to C's request, which seemed to be a type of positive politeness strategy (P+9) as he fulfilled C's wants by showing his cooperation. After this, in turn 3 and turn 4, he continued the conversation by mentioning that he was still working on the task required by the exchange activity and expressed his will to complete the task soon. C then gave a confirmatory response "Yeah" in turn 5, which seemed to show her agreement with T's statement as well as her understanding of T's situation. As the course design required both of the participants to finish their first version of WIKI pages before they started the first chat session, C's short response seemed to show her awareness of T's not fulfilling what they were required to do and waited T to explain more. As we can see in the following turn, T gave his deference to his interlocutor by apologizing for not fulfilling the task in time (P-3) and gave a reason to explain the situation (P+7). After this, T shifted the focus of their conversation to the discussion of each other's culture (the main purpose of the exchange) by asking a yes-no question "so you know

very little about my culture?” as an entry point for further discussion.

The opening in C and T’s first chat session is very brief and the discussion is mainly composed of T’s description and explanation of his unfinished pre-chat task. It appeared that the setting, that is, the situated context, was being referred to by the participants as a strategy to start their conversation (Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984). Their closing in the first chat session (Episode 5.2) is similar to the opening in terms that the discussion is only centred on the negotiation of the topic and time for next chat session.

<i>Episode 5.2: C&T, IM-1(Closing)</i>	
133.	C: Well...time is almost up @@
134.	T: oh yes
135.	T: do you want to decide the topic for next talk?
136.	C: "How do you spend your leisure time such as weekends & vacation?"
137.	C: Is that okay?
138.	T: fine by me
139.	C: Okay
140.	C: Then see you next time. Nice talking to you...
141.	T: okay, do you know when the next session will be?
142.	C: I am not sure, actually...
143.	T: ok, nice to talk to you. talk to you soon
144.	C: bye
145.	T: Bye

C initiated the move to end the first chat session in turn 133 by giving the reminder “well...time is almost up” with the emotional icon “@@” created by herself. The reason for her to initiate the move could be that she treated her collaboration with T in the intercultural exchange as a formal meeting so she thought it important to follow the course instruction by controlling the time of their chat session so as to not intrude T’s private time (P-1). C has confirmed this in the member check conducted after the analysis (3.6.4). The emotional icon “@@” might be used with the attempt to mitigate the potential threat to T’s positive face posed by her reminder that time was almost up. She appeared to focus only on the completion of the tasks required by the course and showed no intention in developing any personal talk at the moment. T confirmed with “oh yes” in turn 134 to C’s initiation. The exclamation “oh” in front of “yes” seemed to indicate a certain degree of his unexpectedness to this initiation by C, which showed that T might have focused on the chat itself and did not notice that time

was already up for this chat session. His confirmation statement was followed by a question in turn 135 about the topic for next chat session and another question in turn 141 about the time for next chat. The question in turn 135 “do you want to decide the topic for next talk” is another negative politeness strategy (P-2) used by T by being conventionally indirect in terms of asking whether C would like to decide the topic for next session. C suggested a topic in turn136 and asked “Is that okay?” in turn 137, which showed that she was not assuming T would necessarily accept the topic she suggested so it is also a negative politeness strategy (P- 2) being used to show her respect of T’s freedom to decide and negotiate the topic with her. After the topic has been decided, C gave a positive feedback “nice talking to you” in turn 140 as “phatics and salutations” for purely social function (P+4), which has received the same response from T (reciprocity, see 5.2.3). The conversation then ended with the farewell phrase “bye” from both participants.

As shown by the analysis above, C and T have maintained a formal and brief style of talking to each other both in their opening and closing parts in their first chat session. More negative politeness strategies were used than the positive ones, which meant the social distance between them was still high. In the second chat session as shown below, T has made several moves which showed his intention to shorten the distance between himself and C. These moves have helped the flow of their conversation by eliciting more input from C to the conversation. However, C appeared to avoid any personal talk in the conversation and stuck to her preferred style of keeping the talk formal and task-oriented only.

<i>Episode 5.3: C&T, IM-2 (Opening)</i>	
1. C:	Hey, shall we start?
2. T:	ok,
3. T:	how are you?
4. C:	fine...(I spent most of my time today sleeping...)
5. T:	not surprising
6. C:	haha (I spent more than 6 hours on the train yesterday...)
7. T:	I would imagine. are you returning back today?
8. C:	No. Last night...or I could say in the midnight.
9. C:	We agreed last time that the topic for the second talk would be "What would you like to do in leisure time." Am I right?
10. C:	correct
11. T:	what do you do during your leisure time?

In the opening of C and T's second chat session, C, followed the same pattern as in her first chat session and started the conversation with a brief greeting followed by the question (P-2) to initiate the start of the chat. T agreed with the initiation. Different from the first chat session, he asked a greeting question "how are you" in turn 3 after the agreement token "ok", which, according to Garrison and Anderson's (2003) theory, was an indicator of social presence and therefore can be seen as a positive politeness strategy use (P+4). This move prompted C to do certain self-disclosure (P+2) in turn 4 and 6. T showed his understanding of C's needs (P+5) by saying "not surprising" in turn 5 and "I would imagine" in turn 7 and asked another question "are you returning back today" to continue the more personally-oriented conversation between them. C answered the question in turn 8. However, in turn 9, instead of asking another reciprocal greeting question, which is what normally expected to be done after being asked the question "how are you", C showed no intention to continue the more personally-oriented conversational talk and started their task-focused talk by mentioning the agreement she and T made in the last chat session about the topic for their second chat. She softened this initiation by adding a yes-no question "Am I right?" (P-2) after her statement about their agreement on the topic. T answered "correct" to this question and then started their task-focused talk by asking the first question that was related to the topic of this chat session.

We can see in the opening of C and T's second chat session that T has shown his intention to make his conversation with C start with a more personal-oriented style by asking the greeting question "how are you"; however, C did not appear to show the same intention although she has done some self-disclosure in order to give response to T's greeting question. Instead of asking T a reciprocal greeting question, she directed their talk to focus on the topic of their online exchange. Similar scenarios can also be found in the closing of their second chat session as shown below.

Episode 5.4: C&T, IM-2 (Closing)

228. C: Well, time is almost up. (My father has kept urging me to dinner...)
229. C: Our third talk session will be next Saturday?
230. T: yes, I didn't see that. Anyway, it's an interesting talk
231. T: I'm not sure, I may not be here next weekend. But I can send an email
before Wednesday
232. C: Alright. No problem.
233. T: enjoy your stay with your family. talk to you soon
234. C: Do you prefer any topic for next time?
235. T: no, do you? something about history?
236. C: Okay. Then I will work on something about Taiwanese history...
237. T: that will be interesting
238. C: Okay. I will share with u Taiwanese history next time ^^
239. T: look forward to. take care
240. C: Good bye:)
241. T: good bye

In the closing of the second chat session, C again made the move to initiate the end of the conversation in turn 228. She gave a reason (My father has kept urging me to dinner...) this time to explain this move, which was a positive politeness strategy use (P+7) to mitigate this move's potential threat to her interlocutor's positive face. The reason given by C to explain why she wanted to end the conversation may be taken as an indication of her intention to save her interlocutor's positive face. She also used the inclusive pronoun "our" in turn 229 (P+8) to question about the time of the next chat session. In turn 230, T responded that he did not notice the time was up and said it was an interesting talk, which could be viewed as showing his appreciation (P+10) to the talk between him and his interlocutor. He also made a promise in turn 231 to send an email to confirm the time for the next session and showed his concern to C in turn 233 by wishing C to enjoy her stay with her family (P+5). The latter is a positive politeness strategy made by T to assert his knowledge of and concern for C's wants. C gave her response in turn 232 to the promise offered by T but she did not react to the appreciation and the concern expressed by T in turn 230 and turn 233. Instead, she raised another task-oriented question "do you prefer any topic for next time" in turn 234. T suggested the topic to be something about history, which C agreed to and offered her promise that she would work on something about Taiwanese history (P+9). T further gave appreciation and showed his interest (P+10, P+11) in knowing about Taiwanese history from C in turn 237. C confirmed again that she would prepare for the talk about Taiwanese history with a smiley emoticon (icons that show

emotions) (P+1) at the end of turn 238. T gave his appreciation “look forward to” and concern “take care” again in turn 239. However, C did not give similar reciprocal responses; instead, she just said good bye with another smiley emoticon.

Episode 5.4 above demonstrates that the interactional pattern between interlocutors was negotiated and co-constructed by both parties in the conversation. T, in the dialogue, has used several positive politeness strategies including showing his appreciation and concern and asserting his concern about C’s wants, which demonstrated his intention to shorten the social distance between them and establish more personal relationship with C. However, C’s lack of reciprocal response (to these moves made by T, e.g. she did not respond to T’s statements in turns 3, 6, and 12) seems to indicate that C tended to keep their conversation more task-oriented and less personal-oriented, which was confirmed in the post-analysis member check as well. Although C used mostly positive politeness strategies in this closing part of their conversation (Episode 5-4), she seemed to stay in a more formal style of interaction and ignored the more personal-oriented moves initiated by her interlocutor. According to Ware (2005), the discrepancy in interactional purposes might cause tensions between the online learners. However, T, instead of complaining about C’s lack of reciprocal responses, appeared to respect C’s choice of style. For example, in the post-exchange questionnaire, when asked about his feelings toward the communication between him and his interlocutor, he said that *“they had some difficulties to understand each other at the beginning, that was resolved on the following sessions.”* The difficulties he referred to was not related to C’s lack of response to the appreciation or concerns he gave in their conversation but other difficulties that were caused by the lack of certain contextualization cues (such as gestures, facial expressions, tones and intonations etc.) in the computer-mediated communication. In addition, at the end of their exchange, he mentioned to C that *“It’s all new experience for me, know somebody with quite wide knowledge, motive and willing to learn. Pleasure is mine.”* It seems that although C and T showed different styles in interaction in their talk, they actually adjusted to each other’s style in the process. In spite of the fact that their interactional pattern was still in a much more formal way if compared with another pair, P and J’s interaction (which will be shown in the analysis of Pair Two in the next section), their mutual understanding was gradually increased

and more and more positive politeness strategies were used, which indicated that their social distance was also gradually diminished.

C and T’s openings and closings in their following three chat sessions (see Pair 1 - C&T, IM-3, IM-4, IM-5 in data CD) still remained brief and formal. However, in the closing part of their last chat session (C&T, IM-5), longer time has been spent in the talk and more personal-oriented style have been observed as shown in Episode 5.5 below.

<i>Episode 5.5: C&T, IM-5 (Closing)</i>
164. T: I think we overrun our time, sorry
165. C: Don't worry
166. C: Your talking is much more profound and impressive than mine.
167. T: I don't think so, It's all different
168. T: good to learn about your history and your culture
169. C: Me too
.....
178. C: I will bring some Taiwanese tea to you
179. C: :)
180. T: Green tea?
181. C: Yes
182. T: great
183. C: I love Taiwanese green tea. Proud of it.
.....
195. C: All right. Thank Shu-mei for giving me the opportunity to make a new friend.
196. T: I have to thank her too. It's all new experience for me, know somebody with quite wide knowledge, motive and willing to learn. pleasure is mine.
197. C: Right. Thank you anyway. May God bless you. Hope to see you in U.K.
198. T: wish you all the best. Keep in touch. see you sometime in UK.:)
199. C: Yes. Keep in touch.
200. C: I am going to go to the library to hit on books now.
201. T: ok, take care. bye
202. C: See you. Good Bye:D
203. T: :-h

In Episode 5.5, T’s apology for overrunning the time (P-3) due to his talk about his own history in turn 164 might be an indication of his adjustment to C’s style of keeping their chat sessions in a formal way. In turns 165 and 166, C responded to this move by saying “don’t worry” and showed her appreciation (P+10) toward T’s introduction of Sri Lanka’s history by mentioning that T’s talk was much more profound and impressive than hers. T showed his modest by saying “I don’t think so.

It's all different" in turn 167 and gave the same admiration to C in turn 168.

In turn 178, C promised to bring Taiwanese tea to T if she is admitted to the UK postgraduate study in the future; by doing so, she has showed her good will by raising some common ground between her and T (P+5), which resonated with their talk about tea culture in the first chat session and stressed her Taiwanese identity again by saying that she is proud of Taiwanese green tea. Green tea seems to be a symbol of her country to C in this utterance so being proud of it means being proud of being a Taiwanese. Finally, in turn 195, C tried to end the conversation by expressing her appreciation (P+10) of being able to make a new friend from Sri Lanka. T showed the same appreciation in turn 196. In turn 197, C further showed her care by giving wishes and mentioned that she hoped she would be able to see T again in the UK, which is another positive politeness strategy of being optimistic and supportive in the utterance (P+6). T responded in a similar way and they promised to keep in touch with each other. Finally, C gave a reason for leaving (P+7). Then, the conversation ends with farewell and smiley emoticons that showed their good will and appreciation to each other.

C's appreciation to T's introduction of Sri Lankan history to her in the beginning of the closing part might be just a politeness strategy that satisfies T's positive-face need such as she wants to be understood and to be admired. However, from C's input in her post-exchange questionnaire and her email communication with me, it appeared that this was not just a positive politeness strategy use but also what she really felt in her mind. T's talk about Sri Lankan history appears to have exerted significant impact on C; this could be seen in her response to the post-exchange questionnaire question *"What's the impression of the target culture you got from this exchange?"* She answered:

"His familiarity with his own national history as well as his concern about the status quo of his country." (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-C, Q11)

For the next question in the questionnaire: *"In what way is the impression different from or similar with the impression you held before?"* She continued to express the

following:

“Before I participated in this project, my impression with Sri Lanka was nothing but black tea. In other words, I tended to associated this country from a materialistic perspective, not knowing its rich cultural and historical backgrounds.” (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-C, Q12)

When being asked *“What do you think you’ve benefited the most from the exchange”*, C’s response is: *“My partner helped me broaden my horizon toward the world.”* (Post-exchange Questionnaire, TW-C, Q2) In addition, in the email communication with me, she has written the following paragraph in two languages: English and Mandarin Chinese (the underlined English within the brackets is the translation of the Mandarin Chinese she used in the email communication):

“We just finished the last talk. Plz download the attached file. 斯里蘭卡先生剛跟我說完他們的歷史，真是太悲慘了...聽了好難過@@ [Mr. Sri Lanka just finished talking about their history to me – it is really too miserable....I feel so sad after hearing it. @@]

Okay. I will try my best to complete my WIKI. Thank you for giving me such a precious opportunity to make a friend of Sri Lanka. I really appreciate it.”

In this email, she switched to Mandarin Chinese when talking about her impression toward their fifth session of talk (episode 5.5). It seems that the impact of T’s talk was so enormous on C that only by using her native language could she fully express the strong emotional wave caused by T’s talk in her mind.

In sum, C and T’s talk in most openings and closings appeared to focus on task-related discussion only. They appeared to have little social or personal talk in their openings and closings. Normally, they started with a very formal statement like “shall we start?” and ended with the negotiation of topics and time for next chat session. However, we did see an increased use of positive politeness strategies in the latter chat sessions, especially in the closing of their last chat session. In addition, C seemed to prefer to maintain their talk in a formal style as she chose to not respond to some more personal-oriented moves made by T, which T appeared to accept and adjust to in the latter sessions of interaction.

In the next section, the interactional pattern between another pair of learners, P and J, is analysed and the differences of interactional patterns between this pair and the previous pair, C and T, are highlighted. P, native in Mandarin Chinese, was a fourth-year English-major student in a university in southern Taiwan while J was a third-year engineering student in a UK university. J is native in English but learns Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in the university language centre.

5.4 Pair Two (P&J)

<i>Episode 5.6: P&J, IM-1 (Opening)</i>
1. P: so sorry for being late! 2. J: no worries :-D how are you doing today? 3. P: great! I went to a movie. How are you? 4. J: very tired, still recovering from the weekend! 5. J: Have you heard of the SONAR music festival in Barcelona?

P and J’s opening in their first chat session began with P’s apology for being late. J replied with “no worries” (showing his sympathy and understanding) adding a big smiley (the emoticon) and asked the conventional greeting question “how are you doing today”. P gave her response and then reciprocated with the same question. J then gave his response in turn 4. Both P and J have disclosed some details of their personal life in their responses to the greeting questions. The self-disclosure, according to Garrison and Anderson’s (2003) framework, is an indicator of learners’ affective social presence. It can also be viewed as a positive politeness strategy as when this is done, the social distance between the interlocutors is reduced and more common ground may be claimed. From turn 5, J, while aiming to explain why he felt tired from the weekend, started his inquiry about the music culture in Taiwan. It can be asserted that their opening conversation has, then, been smoothly shifted to the exchange of cultural information. Compared with C and T’s opening in the first chat session (Episode 5.1), P and J did not refer to any task-oriented discussion; instead, they greeted to each other as would friends do in a face-to-face conversation. The contrast between these two groups is especially salient if we look at P and J’s closing of their first chat session as shown below.

Episode 5.7:P&J, IM-1 (Closing)

112. J: listen, shall we pick up from here tomorrow?
113. P: sure
 nice to talk to you :)
114. J: yes, and you! i wasn't too sure what to say at first
 but i think there is still plenty of things to talk about
115. P: me, too >"<
 it's a bit awkward at first
116. J: it can only get easier - do we have to write more on our webpages now?
117. P: but you are an interesting people to talk to :P
 i think so...
118. J: you too :-)
119. P: good afternoon then :)
120. J: one thing, i'm actually travelling home tomorrow and i don't know if my
 bus will be on time, it's usually late
 could we start a little bit later just in case it is?
121. P: sure! about what time?
122. J: starting at 3 o'clock maybe?
 i keep meaning to ask, what time is that for you?
123. P: it's 10PM in Taiwan, and it's OK for me
124. J: great...until then, you have a good evening too..
125. P: thank you :)
126. J: bye :-)
127. P: bye!

In the closing of P and J's first chat session, we observe J made the move to end the conversation. As ending a conversation is a potential threat to his interlocutor's face, he did this indirectly by asking the question "shall we pick up from here tomorrow" (P-2) although the imperative phrase "listen" in front of the question sounded authoritative. P gave a cooperative response and showed her good will by saying "nice to talk to you." (P+4) In turn 114, J gave a reciprocal feedback and made some self-disclosure by admitting to P that he was not too sure what to say at first followed by the use of a positive politeness strategy (P+6: being supportive) by mentioning that "it can only get easier" in turn 116. P shared with J that she had the same feeling in turn 115 and emphasized again in turn 117 that J was an interesting person to talk to (P+10). From turn 120, J tried to negotiate the time for next chat session. He gave reasons to explain why he would like to do this (P+7). From turn 121 to 124, P and J successfully reached an agreement of the time for their next talk. J then gave wishes to P and P responded with appreciation. The conversation is then ended with the

farewell from both of them.

We can see many positive politeness strategies and reciprocal responses were used by J and P in their conversation, which I interpret as shortening the social distance between them. Compared with C and T's formal closing in their first chat session (Episode 5.2), J and P have engaged more in personally-oriented talk and both of them gave reciprocal responses to their interlocutor's initiations. More personally-oriented conversation can be observed in the second chat session between P and J as shown below.

Episode 5.8: P&J, IM-2 (Opening)

1. J: hey P
2. P: Hi!
so are you at home now?
3. J: yes, just in the door this minute
It's only three hours from London to Bristol by bus but it seems very tiring.... i'm just reading your WIKI
4. P: do you need some time to rest?
5. J: no, it's ok
i just don't have time to type up my WIKI, my apologies
6. P: I forgot to read your WIKI page >"<
7. J: hehe, it'll be up after we finish today
8. P: I'll read it now
all right, no problem :)
9. J: i think at the end of yesterday we started to talk about ambitions..

In the opening of P and J's second chat session, we note in turn 1 how J mentions P's name in his greeting, which, according to Garrison and Anderson's (2003) framework, is an indicator of social presence since the use of the interlocutor's name shows their familiarity with each other and also further shortens their distance. In turn 2, P, after the greeting, asked the question "so are you at home now?", which was a positive politeness strategy (P+5) in terms that it conveyed P's concern about J's activity of going home, which was mentioned by J in the closing part of their first chat session (Episode 5.7). J gave a confirmatory response and mentioned that the journey was tiring, which was also a type of self-disclosure. P's response in turn 4 (asking "do you need some time to rest") was a politeness strategy applied both to her interlocutor's positive and negative faces. By asking this question, she showed her concern for J's needs (P+5), a positive politeness strategy, while on the other hand, she also gave J the freedom to decide whether to have the chat session or not by not

assuming that J would definitely feel comfortable to conduct the chat session with her as agreed, which served to satisfy J's negative face needs (P-1). J's reply in turn 5 was also a mixture of positive and negative politeness strategies. On the one hand, he saved P's positive face by showing his willingness to conduct the talk in spite of the tiredness and making his tiredness as a reason for his not completing his WIKI page this time (P+7). On the other hand, he used the negative politeness strategy of apologizing in order to save P's negative face (P-3); that is, the need to be respected. They, then, spent a few turns (turn 6 to 8) to clarify to each other their current status and expected work toward their communication on WIKI pages. After this, J directed their attention to task-focused talk by mentioning the topic that they have started to talk about at the end of their first chat session and thus started their exchange of cultural information.

As can be observed in the opening part of P and J's second chat session, they have spent more turns for social interaction before starting their task-focused conversation than the other pair of learners (C & T). We can also find a mixture of positive and negative politeness strategies being used in this part of conversation. It seems that they not only used positive politeness strategies to shorten the social distance between them but also applied negative ones to show their respect toward each other. In addition, they not only negotiated the details of the tasks that they were required to complete but also showed concerns to their interlocutor's personal life. In the closing part of the same chat session as shown below in Episode 5.9, their interaction appeared to be much more personal-oriented than C and T's and they seemed to talk to each other like friends instead of online course partners.

Episode 5.9: P&J, IM-2 (Closing)

102. P: shall we call it a day? i've got to go and feed my puppy
103. J: yes, let's call it a day
i'm quite jealous you have a puppy
how old?
104. P: three months! she's soooo lovely!
105. J: aww, you should put a picture of her on your blog!
106. P: <http://www.wretch.cc/album/album.php?id=forelle&book=16>
107. J: haha, on the internet already
108. P: i did!
heehee
109. J: cool, well have a good night
speak to you tomorrow?
110. P: hey, do you mind if we start our talk an hour later tomorrow?
111.. J: yep, no problem
112. P: thank you! :D
talk to you soon!
113. J: ohh
an hour later than today or the same time as today?
114. P: oh, sorry for the confusion. the same as today, is it OK?
115. J: yep, i'll speak to you then :-)
116. P: cheers!
:D bye then!
117. J: night!

In this second chat session, it was P who initiated the ending of the conversation. She made the request indirectly by using the question “shall we call it a day” (a negative politeness strategy P-2) and she explained why she would like to end this chat session by stating a reason to save her interlocutor’s positive face (P+7). J agreed with the suggestion. Both of them used inclusive pronouns “we” and “let’s” in the conversation (P+8) to show that they are co-operators in the exchange. J continued his use of positive politeness strategy in turn 103 by showing his attention to P’s statement that she needs to feed her puppy. He also exaggerated his response by adding the adverb “so” in front of “jealous” to emphasize his feelings (P+1) and showed his interest by asking a further question “how old” (P+11). P answered J’s question in turn 104 and also tried to intensify the interest to J by using “sooo lovely” to describe her dog. In text-based chat, the users have to use different mechanisms to compensate the loss of contextualization cues such as tone, intonation, gesture or voice. P has demonstrated one way of expressing her emotions here through the reproduction of three more “o” letters after the word “so”, which “looks” to sound like what we normally do when we want to emphasize a specific word in our verbal

conversation. In turn 105, J suggested that P should put a photo of her puppy online to share with other friends. To J's surprise, P has already done this. The similarity in thoughts and actions has helped to claim more common ground between J and P and thus contributed to the further shortening of the distance between them. In turn 109, J used the phrase "cool" to compliment P's sharing of her puppy's photos followed by the question "speak to you tomorrow?" – the omission of the subject and the use of ellipsis, according to Brown and Levinson (1978), is another form of positive politeness strategy (P+8) that contributes to the assertion of common ground between the interlocutors. In other words, when a shortened form of a sentence appears in the conversation, it might indicate that the social distance between the interlocutors has been reduced to a certain degree so that he or she can adopt a more relaxed and informal way for the interaction. (This also implies that IM chat may be more relaxed and informal in nature than discussion boards since it has been found IM facilitated shorter forms of expression, although to reduce responding time is another obvious reason of doing this.) P initiated a negotiation of time in the following turns and used the emotional icon to show her appreciation of J's cooperation. J responded with the same smiley icon in turn 115. They not only used "bye" in the ending but also "night", which again demonstrated their more personal-oriented style of conversation.

In these chats, P and J seemed to have successfully established a friend-like relationship between them. More examples can be found in the opening of their third chat session as shown below in Episode 5.10.

From the third chat session to the last one, P and J normally started their conversation with a long opening before they started to focus on intercultural questioning and probing. A lot of "self-disclosure" was used by these learners to share with his or her interlocutor what was happening in their life. Examples are like turn 3 "I had a terrible situation on my way home" in the above extract from P and turn 10 "I just had a

Episode 5.10: P&J, IM-3 (Opening)

1. P: I'm sooooo sorry!! T__T
are you still there/
2. J: i'm here!
don't worry about it - i was just about to leave so good timing!
3. P: i'm sorry!
i had a terrible situation on my way home
4. J: oh no, what happened
5. P: so how are you doing today?
i locked my key in the scooter
6. J: oh dear...
7. P: so i had to get a locksmith to open it
8. J: are you ok to chat today?
9. P: yes, sure
i'm fine
10. J: i just had a slightly worrying moment myself
an email from my tutor to go and see him immediately about
"something very important"
11. P: oops
sounds horrified

slightly worrying moment myself” from J. In turn 3, P firstly gave apology for being late (P-3) (which is a negative politeness strategy since by doing so she showed her respect to J’s time) and then gave the explanation about why she was late (P+7) – she also tried to intensify the interest to J by using the adjective “terrible” to emphasize the situation. In turn 8, J showed his care (P+5) and asked P whether she was ok to chat (P-2). In turn 10, he talked about what has happened to himself and this led to their discussion of the relationship between the students and teachers in each other’s country. P’s statement about locking her key in her scooter in previous turns also led to their discussion on the transportation modes in each other’s country in the latter part of this chat session.

Compared with C and T, P and J used much more “self-disclosure” (P+2) in their openings, the content of which provided a rich resource for them to generate and negotiate topics for their intercultural discussion (4.3.3). In other words, their topics for the intercultural exchange mostly emerged and were constructed in their more personal-oriented interaction. By way of contrast, C and T normally decided on their topics through task-oriented discussion and chose their topics for the next session at the end of each session.

Although the social interaction between P and J in this intercultural exchange seemed to be more dynamic than that of Pair One (C&T), they appeared to spend longer and longer time lingering on the social conversation in each opening of the last two chat sessions. They adopted a more relaxed attitude toward their intercultural exploration, which inevitably resulted in their less productiveness in task-oriented intercultural probing in their latter sessions of discussion.

In the next section, I summarize the findings from the detailed analysis of the two pairs' interactional patterns in their openings and closings of their chat sessions.

5.5 Summary of Findings

First of all, both positive and negative politeness strategies were used by these learners to interact with their partners. Unlike Vinegre's (2007) finding that more than 94 percent of the strategies used by her participants were positive politeness ones, my participants seemed to apply a significant number of negative politeness strategies in their interaction. A summary table is provided in (Appendix G).

The negative politeness strategies found to be used by the learners include (P-1: minimise the imposition), (P-2: do not assume), and (P-3 apologize) while the positive politeness strategies used by the learners include 1) express their emotions, 2) make self-disclosure, 3) use humour, 4) use phatics, 5) show concerns and understandings, 6) being supportive, 7) give reasons to explain certain actions, 8) use inclusive expressions, 9) show agreement and cooperation, 10) show compliment and appreciation and 11) show interest. Both pairs also appear to increase their use of positive politeness strategies when they moved into the second and third sessions of chat.

Secondly, the two pairs of learners displayed very different interactional patterns. C and T tended to keep a formal and task-oriented style of interacting with each other while P and J's talk appeared to be more personally oriented. The former pair normally started their conversation with a brief greeting and then the focus was shifted to the tasks in the exchange. Their closing also only comprised of the negotiation of topic and time for the next chat session, except that in the closing of the

last chat session, they have given each other more compliments and appreciations for what their partner has helped them to learn in the exchange. P and J, on the other hand, shared with each other a lot of details of their daily life in their conversation. They normally started their conversation by telling each other what had happened to them recently and there were more reciprocal responses and mutual appreciation in their closings. Therefore, a lot of “self-disclosure” was evident between P and J, which contributed to the establishment of their more friend-like relationship in their exchanges, while C and T did not talk to each other much about the details of their personal life; instead, they normally exchanged their opinions on the topics they have agreed to discuss about only.

Moreover, C and T normally decided on a particular topic for each session and stuck to it throughout the whole session of interaction (although some flexibility can also be seen). P and J appeared to be more casual in their conversation; they jumped from topic to topic; they did not negotiate to decide the topic for each session in advance; instead, the topics of discussion just emerged with the conversation flow; that is, the topics for discussion were normally generated from what they brought into the openings in their conversation by telling each other what had happened to them in their everyday life.

Another finding is that although J and P had a deeper conversation on the personal level, their conversational structure appeared to get looser in the last two chat sessions. They spent longer and longer time in the opening parts of the chat sessions and less attention was paid to the active exploration of each other’s cultures. On the contrary, C and T had a very profound talk of each other’s history in the last two sessions, which appeared to be the highlight of their interaction and exerted a significant impact on their reconstruction of understandings toward their interlocutor’s and their own cultures.

Finally, although their interactional patterns vary, both pairs of learners were satisfied with the way they communicated with each other. In the post-task questionnaires, all of them gave positive responses to the question that asked them about their relationship with their partners. They also felt that their expectation of making new

friends from the intercultural exchanges has been fulfilled.

5.6 Discussion

5.6.1 Interactional Conventions as Negotiated in the Process

Although there was not similar clash of communication found in the interaction between my participants, i.e. pairs one and two, I did find some salient individual differences in the styles of their interaction, which may provide a different lens for understanding more about the social interaction happened in internet-mediated intercultural exchange.

From these findings, we can argue that interactional conventions are obviously not pre-determined by these learners' cultural differences but negotiated in the process of interaction. These learners appeared to have a shared repertoire of interactional conventions. They adjusted their styles of interaction according to the responses they got from the interaction with their interlocutors.

Previous studies (e.g. Kramsch and Thorne 2002; Ware, 2005) tended to generalize the behaviour of their students by some statements like “most French students behave like...while most American students are like...” and these findings were normally generated by the evidence from just one or two cases. However, as can be seen from the two cases in my study, the two Taiwanese participants, P and C, showed very different attitudes towards the exchange. Both of their interlocutors offered warm greetings in the opening and appreciation in the closing. P chose to give reciprocal responses to her interlocutor's greetings, appreciation and concern so they have built a more friend-like relationship in the exchange activity. C, on the contrary, chose to keep a more “colleague-like” relationship with her interlocutor; she did not give much response to T's greetings and appreciation, spent little time in socializing with T and focused most of the conversation on the topics which were decided beforehand between them.

Similar to the previous studies (e.g. Kramsch and Thorne 2002; Ware, 2005), differences in communicative genres also exist in the exchange between my participants. What is different from the findings of the previous studies is that the

result of my research shows that the differences are more personally-based and context specific instead of locally or culturally based since the two Taiwanese participants showed obvious contrast in their styles of interaction. What is worth mentioning is that although the two pairs have very different types of interactional patterns, they both think their purposes for the interaction have been achieved (from their response to Q4 in the post-task questionnaire).

A suggestion that can be drawn from the above argument is that learning how to negotiate personal expectation or interactional purpose with one's interlocutor in the online intercultural exchange is important. As mentioned above, C chose to treat this exchange in a formal way and managed to achieve this in her interaction with T. My opinion is that it is impossible and unrealistic to give a generalized account of what these learners' interlocutors with particularly cultural background will definitely be like. The point is each student may have different interpretation and expectation of the activity they are involved in; thus it is a process of mutual adjustment to find a way to communicate – it is the learner's responsibility to communicate his or her own needs or expectation in the exchange with their interlocutor if their interlocutor appears to behave in a way that cannot suit his or her needs.

In addition, as Ware and Kramsch (2005) mentioned, the negotiation of meaning in the intercultural exchange should go beyond the 'clarification request' or 'comprehension checks' of a merely informative kind to include the negotiation of connotations and historical values that are associated with certain terms raised in the discussion. In order to arrive at the deeper meanings, two things that the learners need to bear in mind is that 1) they have to assume good will on the part of the other and 2) they should suspend judgment and adopt a tell-me-more attitude when faced with misunderstanding. I believe these two points are also applicable in the negotiation of interactional conventions. When the learners meet unpleasant responses or difficulties in their interaction with their interlocutors, it is their responsibility to explore and understand what the sources of these problems are. By avoiding quick immediate judgment and assuming good will from the other, these learners will be able to hold a more open attitude to find out some fundamental differences between themselves and their interlocutors and how these differences influence their interaction. They will also

be able to learn and to expand their repertoires of interactional skills and genres in the process, a goal that is advocated by Kern et al (2004) in their review of telecollaborative studies:

“Language educators should use the Internet not so much to teach the same thing in a different way, but rather to help students enter into a new realm of collaborative inquiry and construction of knowledge, viewing their expanding repertoire of identities and communication strategies as resources in the process.” (P. 254)

5.6.2 Balance between Social Presence and Cognitive Presence

The next thing we should be aware of from the findings reported above is that there should be a balance between conversational talk for social purposes and task-based discussion in the online intercultural exchange. We should pay attention to the relationship between a more personal touch in the conversation and the possible distraction of on-task interaction from it. As we can see from the comparison of the two pairs in the study, the group with more social interaction in their communication appeared to have less productive talk in their later chat sessions while the other group, although being less oriented to interact with each other in the personal level, was able to focus on the main tasks in their communication and thus had deeper discussion about each other's histories in their latter sessions. Garrison and Anderson (2003) reported similar findings in their discussion of social presence in the e-learning context. They mentioned that “While strong social presence does provide the basis for respectful questioning and critique, it does not guarantee an optimally functioning community of inquiry.” (P. 54) Garrison and Anderson (2003) believe that the fundamental question to ask about the issue of social presence in e-learning is: “how does one establish social presence in an e-learning environment that will support a community of inquiry and the concomitant, critically reflective discourse?” (P. 53) They suggest that the key to answering this question is recognizing that there may be an optimal level of social presence; that is, too little social presence may not sustain the proper functioning of an online community while on the other hand, too much social presence may inhibit disagreement and encourage surface comments and social banter. In other words, successful social interaction is not the primary goal in the e-

learning context; instead, the group sustained by social presence is just a means to an end; the end is to create a quality learning experience for each participant in the online course.

5.6.3 Benefits of Synchronous Tools like IM

In addition, from the findings in this study, we can find that synchronous tools such as instant messengers allow immediate negotiation and repair in the learners' dialogue, which contains the potential to reduce the possibility of misunderstandings caused by the asynchronous tools such as emails or discussion forums.

The medium difference can be a reason which explains partially why the findings in my research do not match the findings of the previous studies. The previous studies to which I have referred have established their findings mainly on the data of asynchronous CMC while my data were mainly composed of synchronous chat through IM. The synchronous feature of the medium allowed these learners to maintain prolonged negotiation and immediate repair in the discussion, which might be the reason why less misunderstanding as stated in the previous studies was found in my research.

Similar to the participants in the previous studies, the learners in my study appeared to demonstrate different expectations (e.g. personal-oriented or task-oriented) toward the exchange; however, because of the synchronous feature of the IM chat, they were able to tune into each other's style more easily than those who interacted through asynchronous discussion boards. Synchronous tools such as instant messengers appear to facilitate the mutual adjustment of the participants' communication styles since they require the immediate responses from both participants and allow less space for ignoring other's message; that is, users of synchronous tools need to be constantly continuing the threads of discussion, giving responses and asking questions in the interaction. If they do not like a topic, they need to use certain strategies to avoid it instead of just dropping it. More politeness strategies are thus needed in the interaction.

Finally, I would like to comment on one of Vinegre's (2008) arguments in her study. Vinegre (2008) had predicted that since the students in her study did not know

each other before, their social distance was supposed to be high, which means one would expect more negative politeness strategies would be used by them than positive ones. However, the findings showed that her participants actually used a very high percentage of positive politeness strategies instead of negative ones. She thus argued that:

“students in collaborative e-mail exchanges are willing to ignore this convention (the convention of using negative politeness strategies in such context) for the sake of clarity and to stress cooperation between partners, whilst mitigating the possible threat to each other’s face by using expressions of positive politeness to show solidarity, like-mindedness and friendship.”
(2008:1031)

I have a slightly different interpretation of this phenomenon. Compared with face to face communication, the CMC mode allows users to be physically invisible to each other, which actually helps reduce the threat of impinging on their interlocutor’s freedom or rights to a certain degree. As a result, a more direct and positive strategy is needed to compensate the distance created by the internet-mediated medium, which is why more positive politeness strategies are observed in the interaction although the social distance between these learners is high.

5.7 Summary

Crook (1999, cited in Vinagre 2008) argued that one of the challenges currently facing researchers and educators who are involved in computer-supported collaborative learning is to discover how “personal meanings and understandings are created, negotiated, and enriched within interpersonal exchanges” (P. 369). In this chapter, I have shown how learners established their relationships with each other through the use of different interactional strategies and negotiated their interactional conventions in the opening and closing parts of their conversations. I have argued that the interactional conventions were constructed by both parties in the process of interaction, with the differences appearing to be more individually-based instead of culturally-based and the learners were able to tune into each other’s style through the immediate negotiation and repair supported by the synchronous feature of IM chat. After analyzing learners’ social interaction in this chapter, in the next chapter, the focus is on the learners’ questioning skills in their process of discovering about a new

culture. Then, in Chapter Seven, the analysis of data will be focused on the main body of these learners' conversation to see how they co-construct cultural differences and similarities through the use of their skills of discovery and interaction.

CHAPTER 6 PROCESS OF DISCOVERY

6.1 *Rationale and research questions*

“Skills of discovery” potentially play the role of transforming language learners from passive receivers of cultural facts into active agents in negotiating and constructing cultural meanings (2.3.3). As Byram (1997:99) stated, “skills of discovery” plays a “pivotal” role in his model of intercultural communicative competence because “they allow the learner to escape the constraints of what can be learnt in the classroom.” The purpose of this chapter is to explore learners’ “skills of discovery” in internet-mediated intercultural exchange, which, according to Byram (1997), can be observed by learners’ use of questioning techniques in the interaction. These questioning techniques are related to learners’ ability to ask “the kinds of questions which elicit further knowledge especially when the interlocutor is unable to explain what is self-evident for them in their taken-for-granted reality” (Byram, 1997:99). Although Byram has described the objectives of using questioning techniques in discovery (2.3.2), he did not elaborate further what these questioning techniques might be. However, studies which can provide empirical and concrete examples of these questioning techniques in real communication may be of value to the researchers for further exploration of intercultural competence (8.6) and to the practitioners for more effective instruction and explanation of intercultural competence in the classroom (8.4).

It is therefore hoped that by analyzing learners’ questioning techniques, this chapter can contribute to Byram’s theoretical framework by providing some further operationalisation of the “skills of discovery” and provide more specific examples of the actual use of questioning strategies in real communication for practitioners of online intercultural exchange.

In looking for method of analyzing learners’ questioning strategies, I found that previous studies (Belz, 2005 and Ware, 2003) have used “questions types” (3.6.2) as an analytical tool for analyzing their learners’ questioning behaviour in online intercultural exchange. This chapter follows the basic format of the framework used by Belz and Ware but some problems of this framework are presented, as well as

other factors that have to be considered when analyzing learners' questioning strategies. The chapter aims to answer the following two research questions:

- 1. What question types have been used by these learners in IM-mediated intercultural dialogue?*
- 2. What questioning strategies have been used by these learners to help them elicit further knowledge about their interlocutors' culture?*

In answering these questions, I aim to shed additional insights into the use of questioning skills in the development of intercultural communicative competence in an IM-mediated learning environment and provide empirical evidence for supporting Byram's ICC model. In section 6.2, I firstly describe how question types have been used as analytical tools in previous studies (6.2.1). I then explain what other factors in addition to the distinction of question types need to be taken into consideration when analyzing learners' questioning skills (6.2.2). In section 6.3, some quantitative findings from the data analysis by using Belz and Ware's framework of question types are firstly discussed (6.3.1). Then, in section 6.3.2, three episodes elicited from one pair of learners' six-hour chat are analyzed in a fine-grained way by using Belz and Ware's framework in combination with the factors discussed in 6.2.2 in order to generate some findings regarding these learners' questioning strategies and their intercultural competence reflected in their questioning behaviours (6.3.3). Section 6.4 presents the summary of the findings and the discussion of these findings.

6.2 Questions as analytical tools

6.2.1 Question types used by previous studies

Two empirical studies (Belz, 2005; Ware, 2003) in internet-mediated intercultural exchange were found to use "question types" as a conceptual tool for analyzing learners' questioning behaviours. These two studies mainly relied on Schiffrin's (1994) framework of question types for analysis. Please see section 3.6.2 for the introduction of this framework.

Both Belz and Ware argued that the way learners used question types could reveal how they positioned their interlocutors in the exchange (2.4.2). Both studies located

their research settings in higher education by connecting English as foreign language learners in Germany with German as foreign language learners in the US. In terms of analytical perspectives, Belz (2005) focused on the discourse of one pair of learners and analyzed how their use of questions related to their performance in the exchange while Ware (2003) compared the differences in frequency of posting questions and the use of questions types in five groups of learners and discussed their relationship to the success of the group interaction. Their findings on learners' questioning behaviours were discussed in section 2.4.2 above.

6.2.2 Beyond the question types

In the beginning of my data analysis, I followed Schiffrin's (1994) framework of question types – the findings of this analysis appear in section 6.3.1 in terms of the numbers of each question types used by my participants. However, in the process of using this framework as an analytical tool, I discovered there are several problems that need to be addressed and the following issues have to be taken into consideration when using question types as a framework.

Closed or open-ended questions

Jones et al (2006) have provided a definition of *closed questions* as those eliciting yes/no responses or giving the respondent a finite number of choices whereas *open questions* are those eliciting more extended replies. Schiffrin's (1994) framework did not consider that there can be open-ended and closed wh- questions as well as open-ended and closed yes/no questions. It seems problematic to merely view wh- questions as more open-ended questions and yes/no as less open-ended. For example, a wh- question such as "who is the conductor of the concert?" is not as open as a yes/no question like "are you doing anything exciting this weekend?" Therefore, in this study, this factor will be taken into consideration when analyzing the data.

Purposes of the questions

Another important factor to consider is the purpose of the questions. Lee (2006) has quoted Lier (1988) as follows to emphasize that simply categorizing questions into

two major categories like referential questions and display questions⁵ and attributing the former as ‘better’ questions may fail to reflect some subtle delicacy under each question type:

van Lier (1988, cited in Lee, 2006:693), for example, argued that this distinction is too simplistic: The practice of questioning in L2 classrooms, pervasive though it is, has so far received only superficial treatment An analysis must go beyond simple distinctions such as display and referential to carefully examine the purposes and the effects of questions, not only in terms of linguistic production, but also in terms of cognitive demands and interactive purpose.

Therefore, in this study, purposes of learners’ questioning behaviours are taken as an important factor for analysis.

Initiating or responding to questions

Halliday (1994, cited in Jones et al 2006) divided speech functions into initiating moves and responding moves. Initiating moves, such as asking a question or giving a statement, are those taken independently of an initiating move by the other party; responding moves, such as giving answers or asking clarification questions, are those taken in response to an initiating move by the other party. I believe this is an important factor to be considered when analyzing learners’ questioning behaviour as my data showed that learners who asked more initiating questions appeared to possess better ability in probing and discovering about the other’s culture and hold more open attitude and curious mind toward the others.

Questions for opening and closing conversations

It is also important to separate questions that are used for opening a conversation and ending a conversation with those that focus on the main tasks of the exchange (Ware, 2003). In my data, a significant amount of questions were used in opening a conversation and closing a conversation. The opening questions were normally used

⁵ According to Lee (2006:692), “display questions call for the information that the teacher already knows or has established at least the parameters for the students’ answers. Accordingly, display questions are deemed less effective in generating opportunities for students to use the target language than are *referential questions*, which ask for information the teacher may not know”.

for socializing and served to “grease the wheels of social interaction” (Belz, 2005:19) while the closing questions focused on negotiating the time and topic for the next session of chat. As questions used in opening and closing conversations were observed to be very similar in each chat session and they appeared to be in a more fixed form of questioning, counting these questions separately may avoid its influence in the quantitative results of questions that are dedicated mainly to the main tasks of the exchange; that is, these learners’ exploration of the other’s culture.

6.3 Data Analysis and Findings

Because of the length limitation regulated for the thesis, only one pair of learners was selected for demonstrating learners’ questioning behaviours in this intercultural exchange (3.6.2). In section 6.3.1, the quantitative result of first-stage data analysis is presented and discussed. Section 6.3.2 provides a detailed fine-grained analysis of three episodes extracted from this pair’s whole chat data by taking into more factors (6.2.2) for consideration in the process of analysis.

6.3.1 Quantitative findings of question types

In Table 6.1, the two learners, P & J, asked less why and opinion questions but a large amount of what/how and yes/no questions.

Table 6.1: Number and types of questions (by P and J)

Question types	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	
	<i>P</i>	<i>J</i>
Starting conversation	17	13
Ending conversation	15	10
Information-seeking	61	70
• Why	7	3
• Opinion	2	4
• What/how	31	23
• Yes/no	20	39
• Either/or	1	1
Information-checking	10	2
Rhetorical	0	1
Total questions	103	96

It is observed that only 9 out of P’s 61 and 7 out of J’s 70 information-seeking

questions were why and opinion questions while 51 of P's and 62 of J's questions were either what/how and yes/no questions. However, it appeared that P asked more what/how questions than J while J used more yes/no questions than P. Each of them asked one either/or question. P used 10 information-checking questions while J only used this twice. J used one rhetorical question while P used none.

Turning to another pair of learners (C&T), we observe that their questioning behaviours appeared to parallel those of P&J in terms that many more what/how and yes/no questions were asked than why or opinion questions.

Table 6.2 Number and types of questions (by C & T)

Question types	<i>Number of occurrences</i>	
	<i>C</i>	<i>T</i>
Starting conversation	6	5
Ending conversation	7	5
Information-seeking	34	59
• Why	7	2
• Opinion	1	3
• What/how	8	29
• Yes/no	15	24
• Either/or	3	1
Information-checking	11	7
Rhetorical	2	1
Total questions	60	77

Another finding is that C & T appeared to use a lower number of questions than P & J in starting and ending their conversations. This could relate to the findings presented earlier in Chapter Five where it was observed that C & T spent less time in socializing with each other than P & J (5.6.2).

Compared with Belz's (2005) findings which showed that learners used a higher percentage of why and opinion questions in asynchronous CMC medium (e.g. emails or discussion forums), this study showed that when using synchronous tools such as IM chat, the learners relied heavily on the use of both what/how –questions and yes/no –questions for probing aspects of each other's culture. The possible explanation of this phenomenon may be that in synchronous chat, learners have more opportunities to request the details of certain events, which is often fulfilled by using

what/how questions or yes/no questions. On the contrary, in asynchronous CMC, learners may have more time to compose their answers to the questions – this may imply that they tend to ask questions that can allow them to elicit richer information and, as a consequence, why – questions and opinion questions are common. In synchronous CMC, however, the instant turn-taking mechanism might make learners avoid questions that may elicit long and essay like responses.

The quantitative findings discussed in section 6.3.1 revealed how the features of communicative tools (asynchronous or synchronous) could affect learners’ use of question types in their intercultural probing; however, the quantitative results could not demonstrate the strategies used by these learners for achieving their specific purposes in the intercultural exploration.

In the following section, a fine-grained analysis is conducted in combination with questions as analytical tools to reveal in detail these learners’ questioning strategies and the intercultural competence entailed in the use of these strategies.

6.3.2 Three episodes on the topic of music

While Belz and Ware were able to use the number differences in their learners’ use of different question types to provide a description of these learners’ questioning behaviour (2.4.2), it appeared that purely looking at numbers (6.3.1) only generated limited information in my data. In the following analysis, I focus on the conversation of one pair of learners (J and P) and make use of their three related episodes of discussion on the topic of music elicited from their six hours of conversation to help demonstrate learners’ questioning strategies in the conversation. More findings were generated through a micro analysis of the discourse between this pair of learners by drawing on different theoretical perspectives on questions such as purposes of questioning, initiating vs. responding questions and open-ended vs. closed questions.

In Episode 6.1, J attempted to initiate a discussion on music festival at the start of their conversation. After greeting each other, he directed the focus of conversation to the topic of music festivals by asking the question: “have you heard of the SONAR music festival in Barcelona?” The question was related to his response to P’s greeting question: “how are you?” His first response to this question was “very tired, still recovering from the weekend.” Instead

of explaining directly why he felt tired, he asked the question about the music festival in Barcelona and this question appeared to initiate their first topic for intercultural discussion.

<i>Episode 6.1 (elicited from the first chat session on 19 June 2006)</i>	
4. J:	have you heard of the SONAR music festival in Barcelona?
5. P:	no, did you go? Is it in Spain?
6. J:	yes, it was from thursday till sunday. http://www.sonar.es/2006/eng/s2006.cfm
7. P:	It looks fun! Which concert did you go?
8. J:	i managed to get a full pass to all the events which was really cool, if a bit intense... the day events are 12 till 9 pm and then evening starts again at midnight till the morning as it is partly outdoor you end up dancing with the sun coming up which is pretty cool
9. P:	sounds cool!
10. J:	have you been to or going to any music festivals this summer?
11. P:	I've never been to a music festival before There is few music festival during summer vacation
12. J:	ah ok. are they very difficult to get a ticket for?
13. P:	you mean in Taiwan?
14. J:	yes
15. P:	oh...i thought you mean in different countries. well, in taiwan, most of the music festivals are about rock n' roll but i'm not really interested in that >"<
16. J:	hehe, that's cool. what kind of music interests you?
17. P:	there's one held on the beach of southern taiwan around may
18. J:	i'd love to go to one on the beach...
19. P:	i like all kinds of music except hard metal kind i've been to a music festival in Sydney years ago they built the stage on the sea in Sydney harbor
20. J:	awesome! how long were you out there?
21. P:	that was the greatest concert i've ever been only ten days, with my best friend
22. J:	i'm sure - who was playing?
23. P:	i think it's Sidney city orchestra or something... I forgot How's Spain? I've always wanted to go to Spain

Although it was a closed yes/no question, which may be considered limiting as it can only potentially elicit a limited response of “yes or no” (Ware, 2003) in this chat example, it has served as an entry point for further discussion (Belz, 2005), revealing J’s taste in music and indicating his curiosity about his interlocutor’s music culture. As expected, P gave the answer “no” but then went on to ask two further questions (“did you go?” and “is it in Spain?”) although the two questions were closed yes/no questions, which, unlike wh-questions, might not provide J much space to elaborate. In spite of this, J gave a web link in turn 6 to this music festival in his response followed by a lengthier explanation of what the festival was like after another closed question by P: “which concert did you go?”

J’s interest in knowing more about his learning partner’s music world led him to ask another open-ended yes/no question in the next sequence of talk in turn 10, “have you been to or going to any music festivals this summer?” It appeared that J was trying to explore what the other’s music world was like by using the cultural icon, music festivals, as a parameter to evaluate the situation. This is also shown in his next closed yes/no question in turn 12: “are they very difficult to get a ticket for?” Although this is a closed question, “the difficulty of getting a ticket” is used as a parameter for J to form an image of what a music festival in Taiwan is like. However, the subject “they” in this question appeared to be vague in its meaning. P firstly asked an information-checking question “you mean in Taiwan” to help clarify its meaning and then described what the music festivals were normally like in Taiwan. At the end of the response, she expressed that rock n’ roll was not the music type that she liked. Here, P has initiated another sub-theme “music type” under the bigger theme of music, which has prompted J to ask an open wh-question: “what kind of music interests you?”

P was typing an example of music festival in Taiwan, which appeared in turn 17, when J asked the question “what kind of music interests you” in turn 16. As a result, before P could answer this question, their attention has been shifted to P’s example of a music festival in Taiwan. J gave his response to the description in turn 18. P’s response to the question in turn 16 did not appear until turn 19. This is a difference between IM chat and face-to-face conversation. In IM chat, it takes time for the users to type the message. The whole piece of message, which may contain one or more

sentences, will not appear on the screen until the user presses the “enter” key. In face-to-face conversation; however, the hearer can receive the message word by word from the speaker right in the process when the message is being produced. Therefore, there is more clear turn-by-turn taking in face-to-face conversation while in IM chat, one user may still be typing a message which is a response to the previous question when another user is already proposing a different theme or question for discussion since the latter is not aware that the former is still responding to the previous thread of discussion. As a result, it is a very commonly observed situation that different themes are juxta-positioned in IM chat. Nonetheless, previous studies have showed that this does not influence seriously in the flow of the discussion as the messages being posted are still on the screen during the same session of conversation, the users can scroll back and forth on the screen to see whether they have responded to their interlocutor’s questions or statements.

In turn 19, P expressed her music preference and then talked about her experience of joining a music concert, which impressed her by its stage built on the sea in Sydney Harbour. J responded to this statement by two closed questions “how long were you out there?” and “who was playing?” to know more detail about the concert. The discussion on the topic did not continue as P shifted the topic to “travel” by asking a how question: “how is Spain? I’ve always wanted to visit Spain.” after she responded to J’s last question. The reason that P shifted the focus of the topic might be that she has not had so much rich experience in music festivals as J has. This was actually a good opportunity for P to explore and to understand more about the other’s music world. However, she appeared to avoid continuing the discussion and tried to divert the discussion to another area that she would like to know more about.

Before starting the conversation in episode 6.2 as shown on the next page, P and J were having a discussion on parental control. From there, P mentioned in turn 48 that her parents are more open-minded than other parents in Taiwan but they had influenced her decision in life once in persuading her to give up choosing dancing as her major in the university. This statement sparked another discussion on the theme of music between them as J had a similar choice toward

music when he was young and they both agreed that creative things like dancing and music are something they could still enjoy later in life even though they did not choose them as their careers. During the conversation, P and J appeared to find a shared life trajectory although P's focus was on dancing while J's focus was on music. However, J took the lead in the discussion again in turn 51 by moving the conversation to the topic that he was passionate about and connecting P's interest in dancing to his love in music. According to Maynard and Zimmerman (1984), unacquainted pairs, or pairs who do not share a previous history of interaction, often engage in extended topical talk by exchanging questions and answers to generate each other's typified knowledge of biography; through this process, they search for opportunities to establish "common territories of self" that would enable them to develop a more "personal" autobiographical talk. The development of J and P's discussion on the topic of music seems to support this argument.

After linking his and P's interests together, in turn 53 and 57, J further explained that his parents are both musicians but, just like P's parents, they did not want him to go to music school. This has aroused P's curiosity, which can be seen in her two exclamations: "wow" in turn 54 and "your parents are musicians!" in turn 56, which was followed by a closed wh-question "what kind of instruments do they play" in order for her to have more information about the music background of J's family. After J responded to this question, P made a statement that her parents enjoyed classical music a lot in turn 58. The term "classical music" here caused some confusion to J. This term, for most people in Taiwan, means western classical music. However, as a native speaker of English, J was aware that classical music might mean any traditional music of a region or a country. That is why he asked the closed either/or question in turn 59: "do they listen to European classical music or more traditional music?" Although this is a closed question, it has revealed J's sensitivity to the possible meaning differences of the same term for people from different parts of the world. P was then confused by the term "traditional music" raised by J and asked an open wh- question for clarification in turn 62.

In turn 64, P asked a why question in response to J's statement about his friends' attitude toward classical music. J attributed this phenomenon to the reason that young people normally do not listen to this type of music, which has prompted P to ask an open wh-question for elaboration: "what kind of music do your friends listen?" By asking this question, P has displayed her

Episode 6.2 (Elicited from the second chat session on 20 June 2006)

48. **P:** They influenced my decision about my life only once
it was many years ago, i wanted to become a dancer so badly and i decided to major in dancing
but they stopped mebut i'm quite grateful actually
49. **J:** that's really interesting...
i think when i was younger i had a similar choice
50. **P:** it's great that they stopped me because now i realize that I can dance even without majoring in
dancing
what is you choice?
51. **J:** that's the great thing about creative things like dancing or music - you can still enjoy them
later in life
52. **P:** exactly!
53. **J:** and i think doing some things as a career might mean you will stop enjoying them
although my parents are musicians
54. **P:** wow
55. **J:** and they still love music, i'm very sure
56. **P:** your parents are musicians! what kind of instruments do they play?
57. **J:** that's why when i look back, i still think it's strange that they didn't want me to go to music
school
my dad is a percussionist and my mum played the viola (she now does more the management side)
she also does a lot of choir work
i'm really glad to grown up with so much music in my childhood
58. **P:** you are very lucky!
my parents enjoy classical music a lot
59. **J:** do they listen to european classical music or more traditional music?
60. **P:** and every morning they would wake me up with symphonies by Beethoven
61. **J:** that's so cool!
62. **P:** what do you mean by traditional music?
63. **J:** my friends laugh at me when i play classical music really loudly...
64. **P:** why?
65. **J:** most students here don't like itonly really the music students themselves
it's seen as the kind of music that only your parents listen to
66. **P:** What kind of music do your friends listen?
67. **J:** i mean Taiwanese music, sorry i don't know any composers!

curiosity about the music taste of the young people in the UK. It was not until turn 81 that J has provided his response to this question. In turn 67, J managed to answer the previous question that was raised by P in turn 62. He explained what he meant when stating the term “traditional music” and apologized for his lack of knowledge in Taiwanese music, which seemed to display his respect toward the culture in other parts of the world.

In turn 69, J further expressed his interest in knowing about the traditional music of Taiwan and in turn 71, he tried to discover what Taiwanese music was like by asking an open-ended yes/no question: “can you recommend some artists?” By doing this, J has positioned P as an expert in Taiwanese music culture. Being in this position, P managed to give a multimodal representation of Taiwanese music by making use of a video clip stored in a popular video-sharing website, YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/>). The content of the video is the performance of a traditional Taiwanese folk song which is sung by the well-known Italian tenor, Domingo, and a popular female singer in Taiwan. This selection revealed P’s familiarity as well as the success of making use of the internet resources for achieving her aim of introducing her own culture to her interlocutor. This video clip not only provided the information about Taiwanese music but also showed Taiwan’s connection to the musicians in other parts of the world. This video clip also reflected a very hybrid form of performance in terms of the fact that it is a European singer that performed this traditional Taiwanese song. J, in his writing about his understanding of the target culture in his WIKI page, expressed his appreciation of being able to “see” and “hear” an example of Taiwanese traditional music through the medium of internet:

It was really cool to be able to see and hear an example of traditional music via the YouTube website – I’ve posted the links for my own bands on my home culture page which gives an indication of the music that students like (I hope!) to listen to in the UK. (22, 06, 2006)

While listening to the video clip, J kept exploring the music culture of Taiwan by asking another open wh- question in turn 77: “what do you listen to usually?” Before he raised this question, he explained beforehand his interest and intention to know about the role of western music in other countries (“I’m always wondering how much western music is listened to in other countries) and expressed his awareness of cultural diversity (I don’t like to presume that everyone listens to the same thing.) Here, J has also drawn the typical distinction between

Continued... Episode 6.2 (Elicited from the second chat session on 20 June 2006)

68. P: i see. i think my parents enjoy european classical musci

music

69. J: ok cool.. i'm really eager to hear some traditional music myself

70. P: they also enjoy taiwanese songs a lot, and some of them are really great
you mean traditional music in Taiwan?

71. J: yes, can you recommend some artists?

72. P: hold on, i'll get you a video of taiwanese songs on youtube

73. J: cool!

74. P: http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=Qke67CiYR_Y

this is a traditional song sung by Domingo when he visited Taiwan

75. J: i'll listen to it while we talk

76. P: the female singer next to him is very famous in Taiwan
sure

77. J: i'm always wondering how much western music is listened to in other countries. i don't like to presume that everyone listens to the same thing.. what do you listen to usually?

78. P: it depends! when i feel like dancing, i listen to american pop songs

songs

when i'm doing my homework, i like to listen to Mozart or Bach

I like chopin's music before i go to bed but classical music is not very popular in taiwan

79. J: as i said before, young people generally don't listen to classical music at all, or at least as often as you do

it's more about music that you can see at concerts or at nightclubs

at the moment it's all world cup music which is driving me mad!

80. P: hahahahaha

i don't watch world cup :P

81. J: in fairness though, all my friends have their own musical taste

82. P: though many people are crazy about it

83. J: i think most people are pretty proud of what they listen to

84. P: that's true

85. J: the fact everyone can share music makes a big difference

western world and eastern world and classified himself as a member of the western culture and P as a member of the other parts of the world. P's answer revealed that she is a consumer of western music which, for her, includes not only European classical music but also American pop songs. In turns 79, 80 and 82, J and P had a short comment on world cup music; both of them expressed their dislike of the temporary but huge musical impact brought about by the global sports event. In turn 81 and 83, J talked about what music his friends were into and further displayed his respect toward individual differences by stating that "I think most people are pretty proud of what they listen to". In turn 85, he attributed the cultural diversity in music taste to the impact of internet that allows everyone to share and have access to different types of music. Their second discussion on the topic of music ended here. They then moved into the topic of internet use, which was obviously influenced by P's use of online video sharing for cultural representation.

After this session of chat, P and J revised their WIKI pages. It appeared that their discussion on music has made J felt it significant to share his identity as a drummer in two bands with P as he added a very lengthy paragraph about his bands to his description of the home culture as shown below:

My band in Bristol is called Kingsdown and the one at home is called Jonny And The Robots. One of my favourite things to do is record the songs we have written. It's complicated sometimes because i have a band at university and one at home too. My friends are very supportive and often come to my gigs (concerts). Live music plays an important part of student life as there are always famous names playing in Bristol and there are festivals in the South West every summer including Ashton Court, Glastonbury and Reading Festival. I really want to go to Glastonbury next year - it has an awesome reputation and lots of events aside from the music. Although people of all ages attend large music festivals, i think the majority are students. They can be quite expensive - my ticket for the SONAR festival in Barcelona was around £130.

J has provided a more formal term "concerts" in brackets beside his use of a more colloquial term "gigs" in this paragraph. P has appeared to acquire this usage, which was shown in turn 86 of Episode 6.3 when P responded "Then I'm sure I'll go to your gigs" after J stated that their band would definitely stop in Taiwan in their world tour. By providing the more common term "concerts" beside the term "gigs", J has exhibited his awareness of the differences in the expression of the same concept by people from different regional or cultural backgrounds. His sensitivity to the term

“classical music” in turn 58 of Episode 6.1 is another example. The other example appeared in another of this pair’s discussions about the expense of going to a bar for a drink. J has provided a US dollar equivalent for the price he firstly stated in British pounds (“I think that’s about \$2.50 if that helps”). All of these examples and his statement that “he does not like to presume that everyone listens to the same music” in turn 77 of Episode 5.2 showed J’s ability to decentre from his own position and to look at an event from other people’s perspectives.

The fact that J did not put the information about his bands on the WIKI page until he had had a more profound discussion of music with P might imply that this part of his identity was a more personal part of himself. Their similar interest and experience in creative art has definitely inspired J to bring this to the WIKI page and marked it as an important part among the different traits of his student identity in the interaction with P.

After reading this paragraph posted by J, P followed the link provided by J to explore what J’s band music was like. She appeared to be amazed by J’s music world as she, not long after J posted this paragraph, wrote in her understanding of the target culture in the WIKI page the following paragraph:

Since I seldom listen to band music, it is a new and exciting experience for me to visit J's two blogs and listen to the music he writes. In my imagination, musicians in bands are decadent and casual. They have long hairs and they pierce all over their face. However, Jonathan's bands are totally different from my imagination. I guess my idea has gone out of date! I'd like to know more about his bands and listen to more of his music if possible. (23, 06, 2006)

P firstly used the positive appraisals “new and exciting” to describe the experience and gave a description of her previous imagination of what band musicians were typically like. However, after visiting J’s band website, her response was “totally different from my imagination”. She also expressed her interest to know more about J’s bands. This interest has been shown in their fourth session of chat as observed in Episode 6.3, which was conducted after they have posted these two paragraphs about band music on their WIKI pages.

Episode 6.3 (elicited from the fourth chat session on 24 June 2006)

38. P: tell me more about your band!
39. J: i sometimes wonder what it would be like if i had to do it...
oh good.. that's something i do know about!
did you enjoy the songs? umm...
40. P: yes! I like one of the song called....(hold on, let me get to your blog first)
41. J: no worries
42. P: signs
it's a cute song
43. J: it sounds quite epic when played live
i feel really good playing it
44. P: or "next train to Brighton"?
yeah, it sounds very relaxing
45. J: i've just finished one called "Between The Piers"
it's all about summer and friends
that's what i think of with lots of these songs
46. P: have you recorded the song?
47. J: only an acoustic version...hold on, i'll put it up on the myspace
48. P: great!
49. J: my internet is so slow!
50. P: did you write all these songs?
51. J: it's mostly the singer, jonny (confusingly) who writes the songs
52. P: i like "next train to Brighton," too
heehee
53. J: he has a lot of passion for song writing
i know, even we get confused sometimes
54. P: does he want to become a singer?
55. J: he thinks his singing is pretty bad
he's going to music college next year in fact
but i think he's more interested in the composing really
56. P: That's great!
i think he can take some composing courses in the music college, can't he?
57. J: yes, definitely
i'm sure he will meet good singers and guitarists there
hopefully, he won't meet any good drummers
58. P: hahaha
59. J: or i'll have no job in the band!
60. P: don't worry, you are a good drummer!
61. J: aw thanks
my dad is really ace so maybe it has been passed down to me
62. P: your dad is a drummer, too?
63. J: yep
are any of your friends in bands?
64. P: no
65. J: it's really interesting your view on band music (WIKI)
i would think that in the UK it's the biggest kinf
*kind

Continued... Episode 6.3 (elicited from the fourth chat session on 24 June 2006)

66. P: most of my friends seldom listen to band music
67. J: everyone is in a band these days!
68. P: biggest kind of what? really?
69. J: definitely
70. P: even girls?
71. J: i think that may be the last two or three years really
not as much but there are definitely are some girls
it's really exciting as there is so much new music happening all the time
oh, i've an idea
72. P: sounds cool
what is it?
73. J: there's a download you can get of new music from the bbc radio station from the
weekly radio shows i'll find the link if you haven't heard it
74. P: no, i never heard of it
75. J: do you use podcasts?
76. P: no.....or i don't know
i don't know much about computer >"<
77. J: it downloads a radio show from the internet onto your computer every time there is
a new show
no worries! <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/onemusic/huw/unsigned.shtml>
there are lots of songs in the middle, or on the right there is the podcast with a
selection of different tracks
78. P: i see ... i'm downloading a song right now!
79. J: cool
80. P: the singer is screaming so hard!
81. J: have you heard bands like mine before at all? or is it really pretty new?
82. P: sometimes i listen to this kind of song, i feel tired and sorry for the singer
it must be very toilsome to scream like that!
it's new to me!
83. J: i know that you like classical music - what do most people listen to your age?
or are there too many different types...
84. P: there are many different types, i believe
oh by the way, i didn't mean to criticize the music
i'm just surprised that the singer can scream like that for two hours in a concert
without passing out .. the music is great though
85. J: not at all! as you can tell, music is really important to me so i want to hear what
people really think
well, when we are on our world tour we'll definitely stop in Taiwan
86. P: that's a great idea! Then I'm sure I'll go to your gigs

In turn 38 of this session, after some discussion of politics, P diverted the focus of their discussion to music again by an initiating statement: "tell me more about your

band!” (P tended to shift the topic when she did not have interest in it.)

In response to this statement, J firstly asked a closed yes/no question: “did you enjoy the songs?” P described what songs she likes and how she felt about these songs. J mentioned about a newly-finished song and suggested that he would put the acoustic version of the song on his social-networking website in “MySpace”

(<http://www.myspace.com/>), which allowed him to upload the musical file and to broadcast it through the website. P asked questions like “did you write all these songs”, “does he want to become the singer”, and “he can take some composing courses, can’t he” to realise more detail of J’s band.

J, in turn 65, stated he felt P’s description of band music in her WIKI page interesting and expressed his belief that band music is an important part of UK music culture – he emphasized the importance by the following statements: “I would think that in the UK it’s the biggest kind”, “everyone is in a band these days”, and “it’s really exciting as there is so much new music happening all the time”. His initiative yes/no question: “are any of your friends in bands?” reflected his interest in knowing about the role of band music in Taiwan. In turn 75, J asked whether P used Podcast as he intended to introduce more band music available online for P to gain more knowledge of band music culture in the UK. P has learned from J how to use Podcast immediately as she mentioned in turn 78 “I’m downloading a song right now.” In turn 81, J asked another either/or question: “have you heard bands like mine before at all or is it really pretty new?” and in turn 83, he posed an open wh-question “I know that you like classical music - what do most people listen to your age?” It seemed that J would like to know what role has band music has played in Taiwanese music culture as it appeared to J such an important part of UK music culture.

Brief Summary of Analysis

We observe that J was leading the discussion in the three episodes, as the topic was initiated by him, which was generated by his drive to enrich his repertoire in music knowledge by exploring the other’s music world. In the first episode, P did not respond with the same high level of interest, which can be seen by her shift of the topic at the end of episode one. However, in episode two, J connected his passion

in music with P's love of dancing and successfully they developed a shared repertoire of life experience between himself and P. Their discussion then went beyond the sharing of biographical data to the sharing of personal values and beliefs (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). We can see that P appeared to get involved more in the second session of chat in music after J talked about his similar choice in the decision of life. After that, P actively mentioned that her parents are fans of classical music, which inspired J to explore what traditional music is like in Taiwan. The highlight of the episode was P's use of video resources available online to introduce local music of Taiwan to J. The success of this second session of chat prompted J to share more personal information on the WIKI page, that is, his identity as a drummer in two bands established by himself and his friends in Glasgow, his hometown, and in Bristol, where he studied. He also made use of online resources; that is, the two websites he set up for his bands, to share the photos, music and information about the two bands. Although being in Taiwan, P could easily "see" what the band members look like and "hear" all the songs produced by these bands. J's sharing of his band music on WIKI page led to their third session of chat in the topic of music, in which J mainly explored P's feeling toward his music and realize what role band music has played in the music culture of Taiwan. After the interaction in the three episodes, J, in the following sequence, expressed his passion toward music again as shown below.

96. P: why didn't you study music?
 97. J: umm, my parents wouldn't let me
 98. P: haha, so we have the same situation!
 99. J: absolutely
 the only thing different is that i really wish i had done it
 100. P: oh...no
 101. J: as soon as i finish education i would like to try to really work hard for a band
 and see if we could become successful. it's hard though - i think you have to be
 quite lucky to get heard by the right people
 102. P: good luck to you! I I believe you'll do well since you are so passionate for it
 103. J: thanks so much
 my friends say i have too much!
 i don't think too much passion is possible though (Session 4, 24 June 2006)

The end of their whole exchange also ended in their joke on this topic:

138. J: i'd like to know how your school work finishes and what you are up to after
 that
 139. P: and i'd like know if you are going to be a drummer in the future!
 140. J: hehe, you'll hear my name on the radio in 5 years

141. P: that's great! looking forward to it!
 142. J: only joking
 143. P: come on ... you can do it
 144. J: yeah, i meant 3 years
 145. P: hahahaha ... good good
 146. J: right, well speak to you soon hopefully
 147. P: ok :)
 148. J: goodbye P ;)
 149. P: bye! :) (Session 6, 1 July 2006)

6.4 Discussion

From the window of these three episodes, we can see how the two learners demonstrated different questioning strategies to achieve their respective purposes in the conversation by analysing the way they asked questions and gave responses to the other's questions. The questions which were raised by J and P in the three episodes are listed in Table 6.3. The labels (such as 1-1 and 2-3) in front of each question are used in order to indicate the source of these questions: the first number means the episode where the question is elicited while the second number means the sequence of the question in the episode. The letter "I" and "R" attached beside each question were used to indicate whether the question belongs to "Initiating move" or "Responding move" in the conversation. These questions are discussed further below.

6.4.1 Comparison of questioning strategies:

As shown in Table 6.3, most of J's questions belonged to initiating moves while most of P's questions served as responding moves. J appeared to be active in initiating and maintaining a topic for discussion and creating a more personal bond with his interlocutor, which enabled their group to have a rich and deep conversation on the topic of music. In contrast, P contributed to the conversation by proposing responding questions to J's initiating moves. According to Corbett (2003), these responding questions were important in the dialogue by serving as the supporting moves that encourage the speaker to continue the conversation.

It was observed that J displayed his questioning strategies in this intercultural exchange in at least the following four ways. First of all, J tended to ask a series of questions focusing on a particular theme so that he could get deeper and more

comprehensive understandings of a particular cultural phenomenon. He did this by

Table 6.3 Comparison of J's and P's questions in the three episodes of music

J's questions		P's questions	
1-1 Have you heard of the SONAR music festival in Barcelona?	I	1-2 Did you go? 1-3 Is it in Spain?	R
1-5 have you been to or going to any music festivals this summer?	I	1-4 Which concert did you go?	R
1-6 are they difficult to get a ticket for?	I	1-7 you mean in Taiwan?	R
1-8 what kind of music interests you?	I		
1-9 how long were you out there? 1-10 who was playing?	R		
		2-1 what is you choice?	R
		2-2 what kind of instruments do they play?	R
2-3 do they listen to European classical music or more traditional music?	R	2-4 what do you mean by traditional music?	R
2-7 can you recommend some artists?	I	2-5 why? (friends laugh at J when he plays classic music)	R
2-8 i don't like to presume that everyone listens to the same thing.. what do you listen to usually?	I	2-6 What kind of music do your friends listen?	I
3-1 did you enjoy the songs?	I	3-2 or "next train to Brighton"? 3-3 have you recorded the song? 3-4 did you write all these songs? 3-5 does he want to become a singer? 3-6 i think he can take some composing courses in the music college, can't he?	R
3-8 are any of your friends in bands?	I	3-7 your dad is a drummer, too?	R
3-12 do you use podcasts?	I	3-9 biggest kind of what?	R
3-13 have you heard bands like mine before at all? or is it really pretty new?	I	3-10 even girls? (are in a band?)	I
3-14 what do most people listen to your age? or are there too many different types...	I	3-11 what is it? (J's mentioning of an idea.)	R

expanding the scope of probing and trying to cover different aspects of a topic in his questioning. For example, in the first episode (1-1, 1-5, 1-8), the focus of probing was on P's personal experience in music only. In the second episode (2-7), J moved the focus to the traditional music of Taiwan, a more national-based sphere of probing. In the last episode, J intended to explore not only P's but also P's friends' music experience (3-8, 3-14) so that he could get a more complete picture of the music

culture in Taiwan. Compared to J, P's probing of the other's music culture appeared to be confined in a narrower scope. It seemed that P was more interested in the "personal information" of J's music as shown in her questions from 3-2 to 3-6 while J has tried to get a more general picture of the whole Taiwanese music culture by expanding the scope in his questioning. Although P has been to the UK, it seems that the one-month home-stay experience in the UK as well as her major in English might somewhat fossilize her impression of UK. In addition, J was able to elicit the information he needed by moving from specific questions to general questions. For example, in episode 6.1, the first question (1-1) asked by J was very specific in terms that it only focused on one festival in one place. Since P had no experience in the specific event, the other two questions (1-5, 1-6) he used appeared to be more general and accessible to most people so that there was more chance to elicit information from P.

Secondly, J was able to make his questions more precise and easy to answer by adopting different question types in his probing. Previous studies (Jones et al, 2006; Black et al, 2003) mentioned that referential questions or open-ended questions (6.2.2) are more able to elicit rich information than display questions or closed questions. However, it appeared that different types of questions are needed under different contexts of interaction. Yes/no questions can be used as a prompt for further discussion or a parameter to evaluate a situation (e.g. J's questions 1-1, 1-5, 1-6, 3-8) while either/or questions (e.g. J's questions 3-13, 3-14) can be used to clarify some possible different interpretations of the meaning in certain expressions. The use of particular question types depends on the context and the purposes of the questioning.

Thirdly, J managed to make his questions as understandable as possible by operating "skills of interpreting and relating" (c.f. 2.3.2) to mediate the possible misunderstandings created by the questions. This was demonstrated by his sensitivity in the possible differences in the linguistic expression of a particular concept used under different cultural contexts (e.g. the use of the word "gig" for "concert" in UK context and translating UK pounds into US dollars), which showed his critical awareness in the cultural diversities and his ability to de-centre himself from the ethnocentric discourse (i.e. the way of expression from his own culture) and mediate

between these differences in interaction (Byram, 1997).

Fourthly, J was able to reduce the possible face-threatening effects caused by particular questions by using mitigating strategies (Ware, 2003: 261) so that his questions could encourage more feedback and responses from his interlocutors. This was demonstrated by some of his statements he added before his questions, for example: *“i'm always wondering how much western music is listened to in other countries. i don't like to presume that everyone listens to the same thing..”* (Q 2-8 in Table 6.3) Another example is his following up his request with further explanation when he realized that the expression or question he used might carry negative connotations; for example:

“is it easy to visit there (China)? i don't really understand the relations between the countries; my apologies for that” (Session 3, 22 June 2006)

J might feel his question “is it easy to visit Taiwan?” was a threat to P’s positive face because such a question might arouse the sensitive issue about the political tension between P’s country (Taiwan) and China. He thus tried to mitigate the possible negative effect of this question by explaining why he raised such a question and apologising for his insufficient knowledge about the relations between these two countries. This echoes O’Dowd’s (2003) argument that when the topics involve more sensitive issues, it is important that learners can use proper strategies to mitigate the possible misunderstandings and to express their opinions in a less threatening but more interesting and understandable way for their interlocutors (c.f. 2.4.2)

Compared with J, although P did not initiate as many questions as J did, she has contributed to their dialogue by asking responding questions as supporting moves (Corbett, 2003) in the conversation. Her ‘back-channelling’ could be an important factor that encouraged J to continue the conversation. She also displayed her ability to introduce her own culture by making use of online video resource and showed her sensitivity and critical awareness when she mitigated about her comment about the band music she heard through podcast links.

6.4.2 Question types vs. purposes of questioning

The findings of this chapter suggest that question types are not the only indicators of effective questioning strategies. Each question type has its function and can serve for different purposes in the exploration, as evidenced in the data presented above.

However, more in-depth and “successful” intercultural exploration relied on the learners’ flexible use of different question types according to the situated context in their interaction with their interlocutors and their purposes in the exploration. In other words, questioning techniques relate less to the use of particular question types but relate more to the flexible use of proper question types for achieving specific purpose in the exploration.

The process of the micro analysis (section 6.3.2) supports van Lier’s (1988, cited in Lee, 2006) argument that so far, applied linguistic researchers’ treatment toward the practice of questioning in L2 classrooms is still superficial. Lee’s (2006) research demonstrated that display questions, which were attributed as less productive questions, could serve more functions than what was revealed by previous studies. Similarly, the analysis of my data showed that the distinction of question types made by Schiffrin’s (1994) framework (3.6.2) could not reflect some subtle delicacy under each question types. For example, yes/no-questions in Schiffrin’s framework are treated as being able to only potentially elicit a limited response of “yes or no.” However, some of the yes/no-questions in my data were used in the initiating moves in the discussion and appeared to be able to elicit not only the simple “yes or no” response but also a rich amount of responding questions from the recipients thus serving as important gateways for further exploration of cultural knowledge.

6.4.3 The role of responding moves

I also found it useful to distinguish between “questions for initiating/opening moves” and “questions for responding/supporting moves.” I identified that the ability to initiate and sustain a negotiation is an important discovery skill. However, the skill of responding should be emphasized more (as the success of intercultural communication relies not only on one person’s ability to discover about the other but

also on his or her ability to inform the others about themselves). The importance of supporting moves in the conversation cannot be underestimated, either, in terms of its role in maintaining the flow of the conversation, encouraging further responses, and the establishment of the relationship between the interlocutors. In my opinion, a problem in Byram's (1997) operationalisation of "skills of discovery and interaction" is its unilateral emphasis on learners' ability to discover about the target culture. It appears to assume that all learners are experts in communicating about their own culture or beliefs to their interlocutors and that what they need is only the ability to explore how others' culture and beliefs are. However, the success of intercultural communication relies not only on one person's ability to discover about the other but also on his or her ability to inform the others about themselves. The latter relates to the person's knowledge about their own culture, their skills to make use of available and reliable resources for expression and their critical awareness of the possible differences between themselves and the other.

6.4.4 Medium factor

Compared to Belz's (2005) and Ware's (2003) findings (c.f. 2.4.2) on learners' questioning behaviour in asynchronous CMC, my participants appeared to use more wh –questions and yes/no questions in their conversation in synchronous mode of conversation. Because of the instant turn-taking feature (4.3.4) of synchronous IM chat, learners were seldom found to neglect their interlocutor's questions – they tended to respond to every question proposed by their interlocutor; therefore, a more dynamic mode of interaction was established between the participants. Previous studies that adopted asynchronous tools for communication, such as Ware (2005), reported that their participants seemed to have different interactional expectations toward the aim of their exchange (2.4.2), which was one of the reasons that caused the tension among these participants. In my study, through the synchronous mode of communication, these learners were able to flexibly and spontaneously make use of different question types for seeking or clarifying information immediately when they encountered the point that needed negotiation. The learners in my study thus appeared to be able to tune their ways of interaction into a more compatible style in the process of talking to each other in real time.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has firstly demonstrated the numbers of question types (in Schiffrin's categorization, 1994) used by a selected pair of the learners in this exchange, which was followed by a more fine-grained discourse analysis of three episodes elicited from the six sessions of IM chat of this selected pairs of learners. The latter analysis on questioning was made by adding more factors for consideration to the original framework adapted from Schiffrin (1994). These factors include the purposes of the questioning, whether the questioning is an initiative move or a responding move, and whether the question is open-ended or closed. It emerged that the combination of Schiffrin's question types with these variables generated substantive findings toward these learners' questioning behaviours, including the strategies they used in the questioning and their intercultural competence revealed in their questioning. These strategies provide examples for operationalising the "skills of discovery" in Byram's ICC framework.

Although I discussed "skills of social interaction" and "skills of discovery" separately in Chapters Five and Six, in the process of analysis I also found that there is actually no clear boundary between these two types of skills. "Questioning" is an important strategy for social interaction. Likewise, "skills of interaction" are an indispensable element in successful questioning. In the next chapter, these two skills are integrated as a whole, through which I discuss the findings about the assumed and negotiated interculturality constructed by these learners in their use of "skills of discovery and interaction" in their intercultural exchanges.

CHAPTER 7 CO-CONSTRUCTION OF INTERCULTURALITY

7.1 Introduction

In chapters five and six, I explored the construct of “skills of discovery and interaction” as introduced in Byram’s (1997) framework of intercultural communicative competence by analyzing how learners applied different strategies to establish relationships and negotiate the interactional conventions with their interlocutors and how they used questioning skills to discover the other’s culture. In this chapter, I will describe how these learners co-construct intercultural understandings in the process of using “skills of discovery and interaction” in their exchange. Based on the non-essentialist, dynamic and discursively-constructed view on culture and identity (Holliday et al, 2004; Kubota, 1999, 2001, 2006; Duff, 2002; see 2.2.3 above), this chapter aims to display how “interculturality” (Nishizaka, 1995) was made relevant in these learners’ conversation (2.2.4), to demonstrate the process and results of these learners’ “co-construction” (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995) of intercultural understandings, and to discuss the impact of the co-constructed understandings on these learners’ development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). In the past decade, although some research (2.2.3) has emerged that has explored the discursive construction of culture and identity in communication, this approach has not been found to be applied to the research area of tele-collaborative intercultural exchange. In view of the significant role that issues of culture and identity play in the data collected within this research area, it is expected that the application of the discursively co-constructed view in the analysis of tele-collaborative intercultural dialogue can provide an alternative research perspective which may generate productive findings for the further development of telecollaborative studies. In 7.2 below, I remind the reader of my research questions and briefly summarize the analytical method. Section 7.3 presents the main findings of this analysis, followed in 7.4 by a discussion of the findings.

7.2 Research Questions, Data and Analytical Approach

This chapter attempts to answer the following questions by analyzing the data collected from the intercultural exchange conducted in this study. The research

questions are:

1. *How was “interculturality” made relevant in these learners’ dialogue?*
2. *What kind of intercultural understandings have been co-constructed in the dialogue?*
3. *How did the co-constructed understandings impact on these learners’ development of intercultural competence?*

The data used for analysis were extracted from different types of interaction between the same two pairs of learners (C & T, P & J) discussed in Chapters Five and Six. The analysis mainly focused on the task-related content in the chat between these two pairs of learners. However, their input in their WIKI pages and in the post-project questionnaires was also referred to support the argument made from the observation in their chat record.

The analytical method is fine-grained discourse analysis based on the principles of Conversation Analysis (CA) (3.4.3, 3.6.2). The reason for adopting this method is the conformity of its rationale to the non-essentialist and dynamic view of culture and identity. CA objects to imposing an identity on someone prior to examining discursive practices conducted by that person and their co-participants (Park, 2007). Therefore, it is a tool that can help us achieve what Johnstone (2002) proposed that

“It is important for discourse analysts not to let predefined categories dictate how they divide up people or texts, or what questions they ask. ...It is important to try to let analytical categories emerge in the analysis.”

(Johnstone, 2002: 129)

Aligned with this belief, this study does not presume how participants with certain backgrounds should behave or what ideologies they are supposed to hold. Rather, this study attempts to see how the participants co-construct the interculturality and intercultural understandings in the course of interaction with each other.

7.3 Findings

The findings are divided into four parts. In 7.3.1, I display how “interculturality” was

made relevant by these participants in their dialogue. In 7.3.2, I demonstrate the process of how intercultural difference was co-constructed by a pair of learners in their interaction and also show how the diversified nature of culture and identity was also revealed in the interaction. In 7.3.3, an example is provided to show that not only cultural difference but also cultural “similarities” were constructed in learners’ dialogue. Finally, in 7.3.4, two other examples are used to explicate how the learners re-constructed their knowledge in the interaction and thus further developed their intercultural competence.

7.3.1 “Interculturality” Made Relevant in the Dialogue

In this section, I discuss how “interculturality” has been made relevant in the dialogue by these learners as resources to 1) bring humour for social interaction, 2) strengthen the speaker’s cultural identity, and 3) search for local values in the global context.

The first interesting finding of interculturality constructed between these learners is that it is used as a strategy for social interaction. Take Episode 7.1 as an example.

Episode 7.1 – extracted from 3rd chat session between J and P	
128. P:	I have so many typos tonight! >"<
129. J:	hehe... me too - think how many there would be if they were in mandarin
130. P:	hahaha

In turn 128, P mentioned that she has so many typos in this chat session. This is one type of “self-disclosure” in the social interaction by admitting her mistakes in the spelling. The emoticon “ >"< ” after this utterance is a symbol that expressed P’s feeling of frustration toward the typos she made. In his response to P’s self-disclosure, J firstly said that he was the same (assert common ground) and then he used their ‘interculturality’ (the differences in their mother tongues) as a resource for bringing humor to this interaction by saying that “think how many typos there would be if they were in Mandarin”. By mentioning this, J has made the interculturality between them relevant in the talk. However, its function could be to serve as a kind of self-teasing humor to save P’s positive face after she expressed her frustration about the typos she

made in the communication.

A second finding in the emergence of interculturality in the conversation is that it is used as a resource for the speaker to claim and strengthen her cultural identity as a Taiwanese, as exemplified through Episode 7.2.

Episode 7.2 – extracted from the 2nd chat session between C and T

- 1. C: Do you have "night market" in Sri Lanka?
- 2. T: "night market"?
- 3. C: When I was in London, my Taiwanese friends told me the night life in U.K. is boring
- 4. C: because the stores always close so soon
- 5. C: around 7 p.m
- 6. T: night life in UK means something else
- 7. T: that's true
- 8. C: Really ~"~
- 9. T: it means clubbing and getting drunk and dancing
- 10. C: Yes. you can only go to bars for entertainments at night in U.K.
- 11. C: But in Taiwan, we have night markets

In Episode 7.2, C asked T whether there is the so-called “night market” in Sri Lanka. “Night market” seemed to be a localized term used by C to refer to a cultural object in her society because T has not heard about this term before as indicated by his clarifying question in turn 2. C mentioned her experience of and understanding about the night life in the UK from turns 3 to 5. T argued in turn 6 that night life in UK means something else and then in turn 7, he shifted his tone to agree with C’s previous claim that the stores in the UK always close early. In these two turns, T has displayed his dual identities as being a Sri Lankan resident in the UK. On the one hand, it could be said that he played the role of being an expert in UK culture by providing new knowledge about the UK’s night life culture to C. On the other hand, he also played the role of being a foreigner in UK culture by aligning with C’s view that the stores in the UK close very early. In turn 9, T explained to C about what the night life is like in the UK. C, and in turn 10, agreed with T that UK night life culture is different in terms that people can only go to bars for entertainment at night; then in turn 11, she argued that “But in Taiwan, we have night markets”. The use of pronoun “you” as well as the adverb “only” in the utterance of turn 10 and the conjunction “but” as well as the inclusive pronoun “we” used in turn 11 seem to clearly indicate C’s being proud of being a Taiwanese. The interpretation being made here is that the

difference between these two culture’s night life (the interculturality) is used as a resource for C to claim and strengthen her unique cultural identity as being a Taiwanese.

A third example of interculturality being made relevant in the dialogue is when J tried to look for local music taste in Taiwan by mentioning to P that he was really eager to hear some traditional Taiwanese music himself. The statement (turn 69 in Episode 7.3 below) implied J’s assumption that there is the difference in music between the two cultures.

Episode 7.3 – extracted from the 2nd chat session between J and P	
69. J:	ok cool .. i'm really eager to hear some traditional music myself
70. P:	they also enjoy taiwanese songs a lot, and some of them are really great you mean traditional music in Taiwan?
71. J:	yes, can you recommend some artists?
72. P:	hold on, i'll get you a video of taiwanese songs on youtube
73. J:	cool!

P was positioned by J as a cultural expert of Taiwanese music. As we can see in turn 71, J asked P an open yes/no question “can you recommend some artists?” that gave J the role of being a requester for cultural information from P, a presumed expert in Taiwanese music culture. P did not deny or negotiate the role assigned by J. Instead, she accepted it and performed the activity that belonged to this role; that is, showing traditional Taiwanese music to J by getting him a video on the website.

The above three episodes demonstrated that these learners have ‘assumed’ certain interculturality between them (particularly national identities) and used these assumed interculturality for fulfilling some of the purposes in their interaction. In the next section, the focus is put on the interculturality negotiated and ‘co-constructed’ by these learners in their process of interaction.

7.3.2 Co-construction of Cultural Difference and Diversity in a Culture

In this section, a detailed critique of a longer episode is provided in order to

demonstrate the process of these learners' co-construction of cultural difference.

Before the conversation in Episode 7.4 happened, P was talking about her experience in New York. She expressed her dislike of big cities like New York and mentioned that she started to miss her life in Taiwan after the first month of being in New York. This statement triggered J's interest to know more about P's growing-up background in Taiwan.

Episode 7.4 – extracted from the 2nd chat session between J and P

25. J: what was it like growing up - did you live in a city or a town or in the country?
26. P: it's a small town
very lovely one, people are always friendly
27. J: that sounds very nice - do you go back there very often?
30. P: i go home once in a month
It takes two and a half hours by train
31. J: that's quite often in my mind
why is that may i ask?
32. P: really? is it too often?
you know, many freshmen go home every week!
33. J: wow, my housemates don't go home at all during term
i go home perhaps every 6 weeks, but Bristol is almost 7 hours on the train
i think it depends on the expense partly
34. P: i see the reason why you don't go home very often!
It's too far away
It only takes me two hours to go home, but you need to spend seven hours!
35. J: i'm getting used it finally!
why do you think that students go home so often?
36. P: Some of the students really miss their parents, I guess
but many students are forced to go home
37. J: ok
38. P: because their parents want to take control of their kids
39. J: that sounds like quite a cultural difference to the UK
40. P: i think it's quite pathetic if parents can't believe in their child
yes, it's very different
41. J: absolutely - it seems quite an old-fashioned idea
obviously my parents want to see me when they can but they have told me that
they want me to do as much as possible while i am young
42. P: I believe that's another reason for parents to stop their children from
traveling on their own
43. J: yes, i read on your journal about gap years
44. P: Your parents are really nice!
45. J: parents take an active role in their child's education even at university
what do your parents think/do?
46. P: my parents are far more open-minded than most of the parents in Taiwan
i can almost do anything if i want
they always support me
47. J: that's great!
48. P: yes...

In turn 25, he asked a wh- question “what was it like growing up”, which was supplemented with a yes-no question “did you live in a city or a town or in the country?” The shared identity of being university students who leave home for higher education was co-constructed between J and P in their first session of chat (*see data CD, pair P&J, IM-1, turns 42-56*), which probably explains why J used the past tense in both of the questions since he was aware that P was not staying in her hometown anymore but staying in a different city for university education. P described the small town where she grew up in turn 26. In turn 27, J gave compliment to P’s hometown (positive politeness strategy, see 5.2.2) and then asked the question “do you go back there very often?” probably out of his curiosity to know about P’s connection to her hometown after she left there for higher education. In the next turn, P mentioned that she went home once in a month and that it took two and half hours in a train. This answer appeared to make J notice the differences between them as he said “that’s quite often in my mind” followed by the question in turn 31 “why is that may I ask?”. J’s response appeared to surprise P. We can see her surprise by the two rhetorical questions “really?” and “is it too often?” she used in the next turn and emphasized her surprise again by mentioning that many first-year university students in Taiwan even go home every week. In turn 33, J gave the example of his housemates who do not go home at all during term time to show how different it is in the frequency of going home between the two countries. In turn 34, by the information given by J about the travel time he needs from Bristol to Glasgow, P tried to construct a reason that attempted to account for the newly-found difference between her and J - their frequency of going home. She argued that J did not go home as often as she did because it took him much longer time in terms of travel time. However, J appeared to not align with P in this argument, which can be seen by his giving a token agreement (a positive politeness strategy) to P’s statement in turn 35. His statement “I’m getting used to it finally” partially agreed with P’s argument in the previous turn in that it is a long journey to go home. However, by saying that he was getting used to the long journey of traveling home, he could imply that he was not persuaded that it was the reason that made him go home less frequently than P did. His belief and curiosity in the difference can be seen in the next question he asked: “why do you think that students go home so often?” P’s response in turn 36 could be seen as a change of perspective to align with J’s assertion that students in Taiwan do go home more

frequently than students in the UK. The first reason “missing their parents” was probably provided to explain cases like hers. The second reason “being forced to go home” was provided to explain many other cases she observed or heard about in her own society. By giving the second reason, P provided the prompt to co-construct with J the difference in cultural practice of going home between the university students in Taiwan and in the UK, which was indicated in J’s response in turn 39 “that sounds quite like a cultural difference to the UK.” In turn 40, P oriented to J’s viewpoint by agreeing “yes, it’s very different” and interactionally co-constructed with J the fact that there exists the cultural difference in the behavior of going home between university students in the two countries. In turn 40, P also stated her opinion regarding Taiwanese students’ being forced to go home by their parents by saying that “it’s quite pathetic if parents can’t believe in their child”. In turn 41, J expressed his agreement with this view by using the adverb “absolutely” and saying that this is an “old-fashioned” idea. He also mentioned his parents’ democratic and positive attitude in educating him, which was responded by P in turn 44 by saying that “your parents are really nice”.

In my view, this episode has not only contributed to J and P’s co-construction of the cultural difference between their societies but also impacted on the interlocutors in relation to J’s and P’s understandings of themselves. For P, I would argue that she further realized how parental control has influenced the way of students’ growing up in Taiwan. For J, he realized how lucky he and most of his peers are to be able to grow up under the more democratic parenting practice in his own society, which was mentioned by him in the post-project questionnaire response. Although the difference between parenting practice was constructed between P and J, it seems that both P and J agreed that it is important for parents to allow more freedom with more opportunities for their children to learn to live independently and to be responsible for their own life. From this episode, we also see how the cultural difference in parental control is constructed discursively in the interaction between P and J to explain their different frequencies of going home. The interculturality was made relevant to the conversation when J noticed the difference in the students’ behaviour of going home between the two countries and raised it as an issue to discuss and construct with P

about their difference.

Although P aligned with J that Taiwanese students appear to go home more frequently and co-constructed with J that parental control can be the main reason for this, she did not categorize herself as a typical Taiwanese students. Instead, in turn 46, she stated that “her parents were far more open-minded than other Taiwanese parents and would support her in almost anything she wanted to do” in response to J’s question in turn 45 “what do your parents think/do?” This instance supports the view that culture cannot be defined as a regular, fixed and homogeneous phenomenon (2.2.3). Instead, diversity exists within each culture. The heterogeneous view of culture is often seen in the chat data collected in this study. Next, I provide a further example of type of co-construction of cultural facts. Unlike J and P, who co-constructed “cultural difference” in Episode 7.4, C and T in the next episode co-constructed “similarities” between them instead of “differences”.

7.3.3 Co-construction of Similarities

Episode 7.5 below was extracted from C and T’s last session of chat.

The theme of this session of chat was the history of Sri Lanka, T’s country. C and T, in their final two sessions of chat, focused their discussion on the history of each other’s country. In the process of telling each other about their understandings of their own country’s history, they did not just act as passive listeners who receive information from the speaker without interaction. Instead, the telling of each other’s national history was co-constructed by both participants in the sense that they kept asking probing questions to each other based on the information provided by their interlocutors and giving feedback on what they heard. One interesting phenomenon is that both C and T appeared to be keen on comparing the historical information about their partner’s country to that of their own country.

Episode 7.5 – extracted from the 5th chat session between C and T

1. C: How many years did the British guys rule Sri Lanka?
2. T: yes, when the British took over the whole country in early 19th century, they ruled the whole country under one administration
3. T: Because of it's location in Indian ocean, Sri Lanka was British navel base during WW2
4. C: the similar case with Taiwan
5. T: There were revolts started against the British from mid 19th century, gradually it gained momentum. But It wasn't strong as Indian independance struggle
6. C: I see
7. T: the internall difference kept the momentum low.
8. T: British introduced Coffee and rubber plantation
9. C: Just like the Dutch introduce ssugar cane and rice to Taiwan
10. T: coffee and rubber were the major exportation during the early stage of British colonial period
11. C: Yes. I know that.
12. T: very simillar
13. C: then how did Sri Lanka get independence?
14. T: coffee plantation sufferd a major decease
15. C: why?
16. T: I'll come back to that in a minuit
17. T: well, they planted coffee in the same place over and over, some how it spread out
18. C: I see. they overused the earth..
19. T: so then they introduced Tea plantation
20. C: I see
21. T: it was very hard for the british to find enough labour, so they migrate labour from india.
22. T: they were settled in the tea estates under poor helth and social conditions, many thousands of them died
23. C: the same case with the Dutch. they migrated labour from China
24. T: they all the same (construct a similar identity as sufferers of colonist power)
25. C: so miserable
26. T: not thinking of the consequences

In turn 3 of this episode, T mentioned that Sri Lanka had been a British navel base during World War Two because of its location in the Indian Ocean. In the next turn, C stated that it was the similar case with Taiwan as Taiwan was colonized by Japan for half a century from 1895AD to 1945AD. During World War Two, it was also used as a major staging ground by Japan in the Pacific Ocean. In turn 8, T stated that the British introduced coffee and rubber plantations to Sri Lanka during their period of colonization and C responded, in turn 9, that this was “just like the Dutch introduced sugar cane and rice to Taiwan” as Taiwan was colonized by Dutch in the first half of 17th century with the arrival and impingement of European imperialism to the Pacific. This response from C further claimed common ground between her own history and

T's. In turn 12, T aligned with C in this point of view by using the phrase "very similar". In turns 21 and 22, T talked about the British army's import of Indian labour to Sri Lanka because of the difficulty of finding enough labour for their tea plantation in Sri Lanka and many of these imported Indian labour died because of the poor living environment offered by the British in the tea estates. In turn 23, C again responded that "the same case with the Dutch. They imported labour from China". In the next turn, T commented "they all the same" in response to C's further claim of the common historical ground between Taiwan and Sri Lanka. Here, C and T appeared to co-construct their shared historical identities as being sufferers in the history of colonialism and imperialism in the process of their sharing with each other their national history and the raising of common ground (positive politeness strategy of social interaction) in their response to each other's statement. In turn 25, C aligned with T's claim that "they all the same" by giving the comment "so miserable", which was further intensified by T in the next turn by criticizing the colonial powers' not thinking of the consequences in their behaviour.

Unlike J and P in the Episode 7.4, C and T did not co-construct the differences between them. Instead, they co-constructed much of the similarity between them in their attempt to explore their differences through talking about each other's histories. The co-constructed similarities appeared to play an important role in their discussion and has changed their perspectives and made them re-construct their understandings toward each other. The significant impact of this conversation can be seen from these two participants' similar responses to question 13 in the post-exchange questionnaire. Question 13 asked these participants whether the talk with their exchange partners has evoked any reflection or thoughts on their own culture. C's answer to this question is:

Yes. Actually, Sri Lanka and Taiwan are similar in terms of historical background. Both of the two countries have a long period of colonization in history. (post-exchange questionnaires, Taiwan-C, Q13)

T's response to the same question is similar:

I found a few similarities with my own culture. Respect for teachers in society. Taiwan and Sri Lanka experienced similar historical facts. In spite of that, language and culture faced similar challenges. (post-exchange questionnaires,

Both pairs – C & T and P & J – were very impressed by the similarities they have collaboratively constructed between them. This is evidenced, for example, by J, in his response to question 12 in the post-project questionnaire “in what way is the impression of the other’s country you gained from the exchange different from or similar with the impression you held before”, he mentioned that:

I was definitely not expecting to share so many opinions - through my study of China i thought we would have little in common because i thought that with our cultures and homes being so different. However, i know now how different Taiwan is from China and that my assumptions were definitely false. I am very keen to see how this continues to change during my lifetime. (post-exchange questionnaires, UK-J, Q12)

In his response to question 11 in the post-project questionnaire “what’s the impression of Taiwan you gained from the exchange”, J’s answer is:

I got the impression that Taiwan, especially the younger generation, is changing from the older more traditional values with respect to family and work. I found that i shared many views on subjects such as politics, economics which i wasn't expecting. I get the impression that the younger generation are very similar to the younger generation here in the UK. P had many ambitions and both she and her friend were able to travel around the world quite a lot. I wonder if this contributed to her very open thinking about the world or if this is shared amongst most young Taiwanese. (post-exchange questionnaires, UK-J, Q11)

It appeared that one aspect these participants have learnt or benefited from in this exchange is to realize how much similarity they are able to share with people from different cultural backgrounds. Before this exchange, they seemed to presuppose the existence of large cultural differences between their own culture and the other’s culture. However, after this exchange, they were very surprised to find that they seemed to construct more similarities between them than differences. This phenomenon further reminds us of the problem of holding an essentialist and arbitrary view toward cultural differences. As we can observe from these two episodes (Episodes 7.4 and 7.5), interculturality does not always exist in the intercultural dialogue. In P and T’s episode (Episode 7.4), although they have co-constructed certain differences in the cultural practice between their countries, P claimed that her

case was different from the majority of Taiwanese students in terms that her parents were much more open-minded than other Taiwanese parents so that the interculturality became irrelevant under the specific context between her and J. In C and T's episode (Episode 7.5), they co-constructed their shared national identities of being colonized by western countries in the history. They were surprised to find that, being located in very different geographic positions, their countries shared many similarities in the history of their cultures. The interculturality also became irrelevant under this specific context co-constructed by C and T.

7.3.4 Re-constructed Understandings and the Development of IC

Another dimension drawn to our attention in episodes 7.4 and 7.5 is that these participants' understandings toward themselves and the other undergo reconstruction, with new knowledge emerging through their interaction with their interlocutors. In the following two episodes, I provided further examples to illustrate how these participants co-participated in the intricate interaction through which something existing is reconstructed while something new is revealed and emerges. This perspective on cultural identities is aligned with Ho's (1995) argument in her study:

*"...identity is treated **not** as a collection of static attributes or as some mental construct existing prior to and independent of human actions, but rather as a process of continual emerging and becoming, a process that identifies what a person becomes and achieves through ongoing interactions with other persons and objects." (He, 1995: 216)*

Episode 7.6 was extracted from the very beginning of the first chat session between C and T, with C mentioning to T that she knew very little about T's country, Sri Lanka, except black tea.

Episode 7.6 – extracted from the 1st chat session between C and T

1. T: so you know very little about my culture
2. C: No. I know very little about Sri Lanka...
3. C: except black tea
4. T: it's surprising, because I never had black tea --
5. T: we import all the good quality tea
6. C: Really!!! But according to my geography textbook in senior high school, Sri Lanka is famous for black tea..
7. C: My goodness...I must write a letter to the publisher
8. C: since they were transmitting wrong message
9. T: yes, you are right, I studied that too. but unfortunately tea expotation is one of our major income. so we try to export much we can
10. C: Oh, I see.

As C mentioned in turn 6, the image of Sri Lanka's being famous for black tea came from the geography textbook in the formal education she received in Taiwan.

Surprisingly, T's response to C's claim of cultural knowledge about Sri Lanka is that as a Sri Lankan, he never had black tea himself in his country. He explained in turn 5 that they have imported all the good quality tea and then in turn 9, he further explained that black tea is mainly for exportation instead of domestic consumption. C's response from turn 7 to turn 8 showed her surprise to know that the cultural knowledge she got from the school textbook was not exactly true. C's response prompted T to describe in turn 9 what the real situation is like in his country, which explained the discrepancy between the reality of a society and the information provided in the textbook that C and T revealed together in their dialogue. C gave a confirmatory response in the next turn to show that she now understood the situation.

This episode demonstrates that the intercultural dialogue provided the opportunity space for these learners to re-examine their previously-held beliefs of which they may never question about the truthfulness before. By providing her previous knowledge about Sri Lanka culture and explaining the source of the knowledge, C co-constructed with T an updated knowledge about the tea culture in Sri Lanka that was different from her previous belief.

A similar example (Episode 7.7) was extracted from the third chat session between J and P, in which P firstly changed J's perspective toward Taiwanese culture and then J provided a different perspective to P's understanding of UK culture.

Episode 7.7 – extracted from the 3rd chat session between J and P

36. J: what about normal bicycles - i always imagined that many people rode them in Taiwan and China.... from pictures etc

37. P: in fact, no! few people ride bicycles

39. P: many people ride bicycles in China, that's for sure
heehee :P

but in Taiwan, since the weather is too hot, few people ride bicycles
i think many people ride bicycles in uk

40. J: ah ok, that's something i never thought of

41. P: when i was in cambridge, i rent a bike for two months

42. J: cambridge is quite a special case i think

43. P: the weather is very comfortable for riding a bike

44. J: small university towns like Cambridge and Oxford which have large student populations have many people who ride bicycles

45. P: then what's the transportation you usually use?

46. J: back home in Glasgow i walk nearly everywhere but if i had more money i'd probably take the underground or a bus
the underground is quite useful in glasgow anyway

In turn 36 of Episode 7.7, J asked about how bicycles were used as a transportation tool in Taiwan. Following the question, he explained that he always imagined many people rode bicycles in Taiwan and China from what he had seen from pictures or other media. This statement seemed to indicate that although being aware of Taiwan and China as two separate countries, J still tended to categorize these two countries under one similar culture and thus generalized what he had seen in pictures about China to his impression about Taiwan. P's response in the following turns made J aware of his overgeneralization of cultural knowledge. He responded in turn 40 that what P has told him is something he never thought of. His understanding of Taiwanese culture was re-constructed after negotiating with P about his previous understanding about Taiwan. After the explanation of the different use of bicycles in Taiwan and China (turns 39 and 41), P further provided details of her knowledge about the use of bicycles in the UK. The only place she has ever stayed in the UK is Cambridge so her understanding about bikes in the UK came from what she had seen there. Again, J gave a different perspective to what was described by P. He argued that Cambridge was quite a special case and that only small university towns like Cambridge and Oxford had many people who rode bicycles (turn 44). In turn 45, P appeared to realize that what she had seen in Cambridge could indeed be just a special case of bike use in the UK so she asked a further question about what transportation J usually used. J's response in turn 46 provided an obvious different case of

transportation style as opposed to the impression P held before.

This episode provides further evidence about how the intercultural dialogue has provided learners from both sides to re-examine their over-generalized impression formed through their previous partial exposure to the target culture. In the process of interaction, they can be seen as re-constructing their understandings toward the other's culture through their self-disclosure about their previous experience and their interlocutor's follow-up provision of new perspective to the previously-formed belief. The re-construction of intercultural understandings provides the potential to improve not only the knowledge dimension but also the attitudinal dimension in their development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) through the interaction with their partners in this exchange.

7.4 Discussion

Most previous telecollaborative studies focused on the analysis of failed cases in intercultural exchanges (2.4.1). Because of the nature of this type of study (that is, to research on the intercultural exchange between two different countries), culturally contingent reasons were often used to explain the tensions or miscommunications happened in the exchange. However, as Goodfellow and Hewling (2005) argued, culture conceptualized in terms of nationality or ethnicity is of limited usefulness in understanding interpersonal interaction because of the complexity of influences and determinants within the individual. This chapter has attempted to bring a different perspective to research on the telecollaborative exchange – by not using the 'assumed interculturality' between participants as a factor to interpret the result of the communication; instead, the interculturality itself is a topic to explore – to discuss how interculturality is co-constructed in the communication, its relevance to the communication and its impact on the development of intercultural competence in this type of exchange. The results of the findings provide a different and interesting perspective toward the intercultural dialogue between these learners.

The findings can be divided into two big categories:

1. 'Assumed' interculturality and its impact on the interaction (7.3.1)
2. 'Negotiated' interculturality and similarities and their impact on learners' development of intercultural competence. (7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.4)

In terms of the first category, I have argued that these learners have assumed at the beginning of their exchanges that they are culturally different to each other because of their national backgrounds. The “assumed interculturality” has been a good source for social interaction between the learners; for example, they used it as an expression of humour to tease on their ability in the target language so that they could give positive face to their partners (episode 7.1). It was also used as a way of strengthening one’s cultural identity (episode 7.2) as well as forming the basis in learners’ use of questioning strategy for comparing the differences between them in terms of music, movie, food, education, histories and politics etc. It has also been observed that the “assumed interculturality” makes some of the learners eager to understand the “local” and “traditional” value in the target culture (episode 7.3).

While some of the “interculturality” is assumed at the beginning of the exchange and reflected in the naturally occurring interaction, some of the “interculturality” is co-constructed through these learners’ negotiation of cultural meanings by using a series of discovering and interaction strategies. New understanding toward the “interculturality” between them was constructed when these learners “noticed” (Liddicoat, 2003) the existence of discrepancy in their experience and opinions in the topics of their chat and then negotiated with each other to reach a mutually agreed interpretation of the phenomenon. The newly-constructed intercultural understanding appeared to invoke learners’ self reflection and exerted significant impact on learners’ views toward themselves or the other. For example, J feels he was lucky after the discussion of “parental control” with P while C expressed great sympathy toward T’s situation in Sri Lanka after realizing how Sri Lankan people were suffering from civil war.

This research also provides evidence that not every individual follows the dominant cultural practice in a society (7.3.2), which supports the heterogeneous and non-essentialist view of culture. Moreover, what seems to have impressed these learners was not the co-constructed interculturality but the unexpected “similarities” co-constructed in their conversation. Most of these participants expressed their surprise at finding there were actually so many similarities between them, which they never

expected would be the case through the intercultural exchange. The large amount of co-constructed similarities between these learners might be the result of these learners' frequent use of positive politeness strategy in the social interaction; that is, "claiming common ground" (5.2.2), the strategy commonly used in communication for shortening the distance between friends who are not so familiar with each other. However, the fact that these learners were impressed at the similarities between them may also imply that the sheer comparison of cultural differences in foreign language classroom can result in an over-simplified distinction between "home culture" and "target culture" in learners' mind. This is very often further reinforced by the media, which tends to disseminate extreme cases of news that often contain strong stereotypical images toward different cultures (Holliday et al 2004, Byram 1997). There exists in modern societies a dominant discourse that tends to emphasize cultural differences by portraying the Self and the Other as two very different worlds, particularly between the Western Self and the Eastern Other (Holliday, 2005; Kumaravadivelu, 2007). The Western Self tends to stereotype or otherise the Eastern Other so as to protect their own interest in politics, economy or education etc (2.2.2). The myth in cultural differences and the stereotypes are thus reinforced and circulated. The learners' co-construction of similarity and their expressed surprise toward this result is a good reminder to language educators to reflect whether they have implicitly transmitted too many of these stereotypical images to their learners and been unaware of the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of culture. Although interculturality appears to be influential in some aspects of the dialogue (7.3.1), the finding of the co-constructed similarities between the cultures in the dialogue supports Higgins' (2007) assertion that:

"interculturality is sometimes present, but it does not always lead to divisiveness or other problems. In fact, participants often treat interculturality as a source for comity, affiliative positioning and mutual understanding."
(Higgins, 2007a:3)

Finally, the findings of the learning outcome in this intercultural exchange can be viewed as an exemplification of Kramsch's argument about the "third place" in intercultural learning (2.3.2). From P's re-constructed interpretation on Taiwanese

university students' frequency of going home (episode 7.4), C's newly-constructed understanding that her long-held belief about the tea culture in Sri Lanka was questionable (episode 7.6) to J's realisation of his over-generalized image about the transportation mode in Taiwan (episode 7.7), we could see how meanings that had been taken for granted by these learners were suddenly questioned, challenged and problematised and how these learners re-locate themselves in a place which "grows in the interstices between the cultures the learner grew up with and new cultures he or she is being introduced to" (Krasnch, 1993:236).

CHAPTER 8 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND SOME IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter of the thesis starts with a summary of the research design and the main findings of this study (8.2). After the summary, the theme of this study, “skills of discovery and interaction”, is revisited from the perspective of how the findings in this study can provide suggestions for further operationalisation of this component in Byram’s ICC framework (8.3.1) and for further refinement of the current ICC framework as a whole (8.3.2). Pedagogical implications derived from the results of the study are discussed in section 8.4, which is followed by a discussion of the strengths (8.5.1) as well as the limitations (8.5.2) of the study and the directions for future research (8.6). Finally, in section 8.7, a reflection is made on my part of learning as a researcher in the process of conducting this study.

8.2 Summary of Main Findings

This research explored intercultural learning with a particular focus on “skills of discovery and interaction” in instant messenger-mediated intercultural dialogue between university students in Taiwan and in the UK. Five pairs of university students (five from Taiwan and five from the UK) were connected by internet technologies including Instant Messengers (IM) and Blackboard WIKIs to explore each other’s cultures through dialoguing. The data collected included the students’ five-hour chat recordings on IM software, their writings about their understandings of their own culture and the other’s culture on Blackboard WIKIs, pre-project questionnaire, email communication between the students and the researcher, and post-project structured interview via questionnaire.

Previous studies on tele-collaboration in foreign language education mainly focused on the investigation of the effects of online exchange for intercultural learning, analysis of miscommunication between learners and the identification of potential impediments to intercultural learning from social and institutional constraints. Inspired by the non-essentialist theory of culture and identity (Holliday et al, 2004; Byram, 1997; Kubota, 2006), this study was interested in revealing the dynamic

process of learners' discursive co-construction of culture and identities in online intercultural exchange, particularly learners' "skills of discovery and interaction". The research focus was put on use of discourse analysis to uncover learners' interactional and questioning strategies in the dialogue and their discursive co-construction of the intercultural understandings in their use of skills of discovery and interaction. In addition, as the intercultural exchange was conducted with the instant messenger-facilitated learning context, the effects of the technologies on intercultural tele-collaborative learning were also examined. The four major research questions were:

- 1. How did the IM-mediated learning context influence the online intercultural dialogue?*
- 2. How did these learners negotiate and co-construct interactional conventions?*
- 3. What questioning techniques are used by the learners to discover each other's culture?*
- 4. How did learners co-construct their interculturality?*

Finding One: How did the IM-mediated learning context influence the intercultural exchange?

The findings in Chapter Four showed that synchronous mediums such as IM is suitable for learners to practice their "skills of discovery and interaction" because of its instant turn-taking feature, which enables learners to initiate immediate and sustained negotiation and repair in the dialogue for adjusting their communication styles and modifying their questioning strategies (4.3.4). Most learners reported that IM made them feel less threatened in the learning process, which allowed them to discuss what they really wanted to talk about instead of what they supposed they should say (4.3.2). Learners were, thus, engaged in "real" and "authentic" dialogue via instant messengers instead of the more monologue-like interaction on discussion boards. The "authenticity" induced by the use of IM in intercultural exploration encouraged learners' release of their agency in collaborative learning in the following ways.

Firstly, they were found to actively make use of multi-modal functions of expression via IM channel to articulate their own identities (4.3.1). They made use of different online resources to help express aspects of their own cultures and to learn from or scaffold (4.2.4) and negotiate with each other new meanings and methods of self-representations under technology-facilitated context. *Secondly*, the instant turn-taking mechanism made the establishment and maintenance of relationship an essential part in the interaction (4.3.4). Unlike asynchronous communication, real-time interaction has higher demands in “relationship building” between the interlocutors. Learners tended to start their conversation by a brief exchange of what was happening to them in their daily life. As a result, these real-life daily events served as another rich source for learners to get a glimpse of their interlocutor’s culture, through which learners actively identified the significant references and initiated negotiation in order to construct or reconstruct their understandings of their interlocutors’ identities (4.3.3).

Limitations of IM were also identified such as the lack of visual expression and being unsuitable for providing lengthier information in the conversation, which suggested that an integration of IM with other asynchronous tools such as WIKIs is necessary and other technologies that enable face-to-face or voice communication should be tried.

Finding Two: How did the learners establish relationship and interactional convention with each other?

In Chapter Five, two types of conversational styles exhibited in two pairs were compared: task-oriented vs. personal-oriented (0). Brown & Levinson’s (1987) work on politeness and Garrison & Anderson’s (2003) framework of social presence in online communities were adapted to operationalise the concept of “social interaction” for investigating the learners’ use of interactional strategies in the dialogue and the process of their negotiation to reach a mutually accepted style of communication (5.2.2). The ‘reciprocity’ in the use of interactional strategy” (5.2.3) was identified as a method that these learners relied on to negotiate the conversational styles with their interlocutors.

Previous telecollaborative studies indicated that national differences in communication genres could be a salient factor that caused miscommunication (2.4.2). By comparing the two pairs of learners' negotiating interactional conventions in the opening and closing parts of their conversations, the findings of this study suggest that individual differences in learners' expectations and purposes for this exchange activity may be more influential in the interaction than culturally or nationally-based discrepancies (5.6.1). The findings indicated that the interactional conventions were negotiated by the learners according to the specific context co-constructed between them instead of being pre-fixed or pre-given before the exchange.

In addition, although O'Dowd's (2003) study indicated that the more successful pairs in the intercultural exchange were those with more social interaction, findings in Chapter Five suggests that the group with higher degree of social interaction may not be the group with higher cognitive performance (5.6.2). In this study, although the pair J and P had deeper conversation on the personal level, their conversational structure appeared to get looser by the final two chat sessions. They spent a longer time engaging in socializing talk in the opening parts of the chat sessions while less attention was paid to the active exploration of each other's cultures. In contrast, the second pair C and T had an in depth conversation about each other's history in their final two chat sessions, which appeared to be the highlight of their interaction and exerted significant impact on their reconstruction of understandings toward their interlocutor's and their own cultures.

Fining Three: How did learners use questioning techniques to discover about their interlocutors' cultures?

Chapter Six explored the learners' use of questioning techniques to discover new knowledge about their interlocutor's culture. This chapter firstly demonstrated the numbers of question types (in Schiffrin's categorization, 1994) used by a selected pair of the learners in this exchange (6.3.1), which was followed by a more fine-grained analysis of three episodes elicited from the six sessions of IM chat of this selected pair of learners (6.3.2).

The quantitative analysis of learners' use of different types of questions revealed that learners used many more "what/how" and "yes/no" questions than "why" or "opinion" questions in IM-facilitated chat (6.3.1), which contrasted with the findings of previous telecollaborative studies (2.4.4) that adopted asynchronous tools for learner communication.

In addition, the findings suggested that "question types" cannot be used as the sole indicator for evaluating learners' skills of discovery (6.4.2). Each question type has its function and can serve for different purposes in the exploration. Previous studies tended to attribute higher value to the use of "why, what, how" and "opinion" questions than the use of "yes/no" or "either/or" questions. Nevertheless, significant functions of "yes/no" and "either/or" questions for intercultural exploration were identified in this study. More in-depth and "successful" intercultural exploration relied on learners' flexible use of different question types according to the situated context and their purposes in the exploration instead of learners' use of particular types of questions. In other words, questioning techniques relate less to the use of particular question types but relate more to the flexible use of proper question types for achieving specific purpose in the exploration.

It was also found that good questioning skills rely on the assistance of other skills (6.4.1), such as "skill of interpreting" to help identify and solve the possible dysfunction for hearers to understand the questions and "skill of interaction" to mitigate potential face-threatening effect induced by certain questions. I also found it useful to distinguish between "questions for initiating/opening moves" and "questions for responding/supporting moves" (6.4.3). I identified that the ability to initiate and sustain a negotiation is an important discovery skill. However, the skill of responding should be emphasized more (as the success of intercultural communication relies not only on one person's ability to discover about the other but also on his or her ability to inform the others about themselves). The importance of supporting moves in the conversation cannot be underestimated, either, in terms of its role in maintaining the flow of the conversation, encouraging further responses, or the establishment of the relationship between the interlocutors.

Finding Four: What was the co-constructed “interculturality” or “third place” between the learners?

Chapter Seven investigated the learning outcomes of this intercultural exchange, that is, the co-constructed intercultural understandings between the learners. It was found that these learners used “assumed interculturality” to serve several interactional purposes including 1) bringing humour to the conversation, 2) searching local or traditional cultural practices, and 3) strengthening one’s own cultural identities (7.3.1).

Learners were able to initiate negotiation actively to exchange their views about certain cultural practices (echoes Tudini, 2007) when they noticed the differences between them (7.3.2). It was found that the intercultural exchange provided many opportunity spaces (Jacoby and Ochs, 1995; Cook, 2006) for these learners to expand and re-construct their understandings toward their own and their interlocutor’s cultures. Their intercultural competence was gradually built and developed in the process of co-construction and reconstruction of cultural knowledge and awareness. The most interesting finding is probably that these learners actually co-constructed more similarities between them in their process of exploring the differences between them. The co-constructed similarities appear to bring the most significant impact to these learners’ development of intercultural understandings (7.3.3). It was also found how textbook or media information could be misleading and result in overgeneralization of cultural understandings – the real-time intercultural exchange in this study provided learning opportunities for learners to discover these misconceptions and to re-construct their understandings (7.3.4).

By exploring the dynamic process of cultural negotiation and co-construction in the intercultural dialogue between these learners, this chapter specifically provided empirical examples to add to the branch of studies that adopted Nishizaka (1995) and Mori’s (2003) analytical concept of treating “interculturality” as “a topic to explore” instead of “a causal factor” in explaining miscommunication (2.2.4).

8.3 Revisit “Skills of Discovery and Interaction”

8.3.1 Further operationalisation

I have suggested that the component “skills of discovery and interaction” in Byram’s ICC framework needs further operationalisation to exemplify what the interactional and discovering strategies are (2.3.2). Previous telecollaborative studies which explored learners’ social interaction and questioning behaviours have adopted some useful theoretical frameworks and analytical methods in their research (2.4). As a new researcher in this field, I followed some of the analytical frameworks that have been applied in previous studies. In the process of applying the previous frameworks for analyzing my own data, I identified certain shortcomings with previous frameworks and then modified these frameworks according to the features of my data. For the analysis of learners’ social interaction on IM (Chapter Five), I found it useful to combine Garrison and Anderson’s (2003) framework of social presence with Brown and Levinson’s (1978) dichotomy of politeness strategies. The process of combining and adapting the two frameworks for analyzing learners’ interactional strategies has further operationalised the concept of ‘skills of interaction’ in Byram’s framework to be the interplay of two different needs in the establishment of human relationship: 1) the need to connect or to shorten the distance between people vs. 2) the need to keep a distance to show respect. For each kind of need, specific interactional strategies were also identified as follows. (For the definition of each strategy, see Table 5.1).

- 1) The need to keep a distance to show respect: minimizing imposition, not assuming, apologizing for causing inconvenience
- 2) The need to connect: expressing emotions, use of humour, self-disclosure, use inclusive markers, phatics expressions, showing concern and understanding, be supportive and optimistic, give reasons to explain certain acts, showing interest, showing agreement and cooperation, giving compliment and appreciation

In terms of the questioning strategies (Chapter Six), I found it essential to consider more variables when applying the framework of question types (Schiffrin, 1994). These include the purposes of questioning, open-ended or closed questions, and the initiating and responding questions. In the process of analyzing the questioning behaviours of one pair of learners, I identified the following questioning techniques

for exemplifying and operationalising the concept of “skills of discovery”:

- 1) Using a series of questions focusing on a particular theme instead of a bunch of unrelated questions
- 2) Making use of different types of questions to make the questions precise and easy to answer instead of using broad and general questions
- 3) Operating “skills of interpreting” to mediate the possible misunderstandings embedded in the questions so that the questions can be understandable
- 4) Operating “skills of interacting” to reduce the face-threatening acts caused by particular questions so that the questions can encourage feedback and responses from the interlocutors

8.3.2 Suggestions for the current ICC framework

Findings in this study can also make some suggestions for the ICC framework as a whole. Although Byram (1997) presents very well-rounded and thorough discussion of the intercultural communicative competence in the whole theoretical construct of the framework, the following three points, I would suggest, need to be highlighted more in the framework: 1) placing more emphasis on “individuality” in intercultural communication, 2) expanding the scope of the component “critical cultural awareness”, 3) adding “skills of responding to others’ questions by effectively expressing one’s own culture”. In addition, I would suggest that the framework can be added new objectives in each component for incorporating IT literacy into intercultural communicative competence.

1. Individuality

“Individuality” is a feature that has been observed in learners’ communicative styles (5.6.1) in this study. I suggest there is the need to address more about the issue of “individuality” in intercultural communication in the current ICC framework (2.3.2). The current ICC framework still relies heavily on the construct of “national differences”; that is, “national identities” are assumed to be the main area of concern for intercultural communication. Byram explained that this treatment of intercultural communication is necessary as one of the initial attributions is usually that of national identity in an encounter between people from different countries. For this reason, the current ICC framework emphasizes that learners need to have the knowledge about

“the process of social interaction in one’s interlocutor’s country” (Byram, 1997:60). However, the findings in Chapter Five appeared to demonstrate that the conventions of interaction were negotiated and co-constructed by the interlocutors in each situated activity. It seemed that in the intercultural encounter, each individual does not necessarily stick to a particular type of communicative style but negotiates with his or her interlocutor to co-construct a mutually agreed convention. It is more likely that each individual has the ability to operate a repertoire of different communicative styles instead of a “fixed” style of communication. It is in the process of communicating with each other that the interlocutors co-constructed a particular way of interaction for a situated context.

Having the knowledge about the process of social interaction in the other’s country is certainly helpful for the interlocutors to interpret certain situations they encounter and mediate between conflicting interpretations in the conversation. However, the problem is: “is it realistic to define a particular set of rules to generalize the process of social interaction for any country when diversity and hybridity seem to be the commonly received phenomenon in today’s society?” The problem is even more complicated if we further consider the dynamic and changing nature of cultures. The values or norms of a society can move with time. Particularly with the advance of technology in modern age, the contact between people has been greatly increased, which inevitably further hastens the speed of change in the way people think, behave and lead their lives. A society is very likely to look different from what has been researched and written about its cultural practices and general processes of social interaction ten or twenty years ago. J’s comment on P’s description of “parental control” in Taiwanese society as “old-fashioned” (7.3.2) appeared to indicate the shifted concept of “parental control” in British society. This fact is further supported by other findings in Chapter Seven, in which I showed how the cultural information about a country transmitted by media or school textbook (7.3.4) could be misleading and result in over-generalized or stereotypical images.

It is therefore important to hold the awareness of individuality in each context of intercultural interaction, instead of the fixed knowledge about the process of social interaction for specific countries or cultures. We could, therefore, modify the current

objective of “*knowledge about the process of social interaction in one’s interlocutor’s country*” (Byram, 1997:60) to:

“knowledge about the common process of social interaction in one’s interlocutor’s country with the awareness that each individual could use different interactional styles under different context with different interlocutors”

2. The role of “critical cultural awareness” in ICC framework

Findings in Chapter Seven indicated how learners’ cultural learning in the classroom could lead to a reduced or over-simplified dichotomy between their own culture and the target culture from the reinforcement and sometimes over-emphasis of cultural differences through the partial knowledge transmitted by school textbooks or public media. From this, I would argue the necessity of expanding the objectives of the component “critical cultural awareness” in ICC framework to include “the awareness of the media, political and institutional influences in our own society” which lead us to see people from other cultural backgrounds in a certain way (Holliday et al, 2004). This awareness is not part of the objectives in the ICC framework although Byram (1997:52) has pointed out the importance of intercultural speakers’ awareness of “how one’s ‘natural’ ways of interacting with other people are the ‘naturalised’ product of socialisation” and Byram has stated that this awareness is a part of the knowledge an intercultural speaker needs instead of the unrealistic goal of acquiring all specific instances and examples of the cultural differences between the foreign Other and the self. It could be, then, that Byram intended to incorporate this awareness into the “knowledge” component in his framework but it is not explicitly listed as an objective under this component. In addition, the fifth component in Byram’s ICC framework, though termed as “critical cultural awareness”, appears to be more related to “political education”, which mainly emphasizes learners’ ability to interpret and evaluate the ideologies underlying the cultural practices of each social group and to mediate the differences if necessary (See Appendix G). It does not, as its title suggests, refer to learners’ critical awareness of how hegemonic social discourse shapes our way of thinking and worldviews.

Therefore, I suggest expanding the scope of “critical cultural awareness”, the fifth

component in the ICC framework, to include the “the critical awareness of the media, political and institutional influences in shaping our ways of thinking”.

3. Responding skills

The findings in Chapter Six suggested another missing element in the current ICC framework, that is, learners’ responding skills toward their interlocutors’ initiations, particularly their ability of introducing their own cultures to their interlocutors (6.4.3). The current ICC framework emphasizes learners’ ability to elicit information from their interlocutors but does not consider the learners’ ability to provide information about their own culture. Although the “knowledge” component in Byram’s ICC framework includes both knowledge of the target culture and knowledge of learners’ own culture, “possessing the knowledge” does not equal to being able to express it clearly and efficiently. In addition, just like the idea that learners cannot have all the knowledge about the target culture, their understandings of their own culture can be partial, too. Therefore, the ICC framework should be expanded to include learners’ ability to express themselves about their own culture and their ability to find answers to their insufficient understanding about their own culture. This ability, as suggested in points one and two in this section, should also involve learners’ critical awareness about the diversified and individualised cultural practices as well as the over-generalised, stereotyped or media-shaped ways of thinking in their own social groups so that they can provide a critical view instead of a stereotyped view of their own culture.

4. Intercultural Communicative Competence in the digital age

O’Dowd (2005) suggested that the framework of “electronic literacy” proposed by Shetzer and Warschauer (2000) should be re-defined to incorporate “intercultural communicative competence” in its construct. In this study, I interpret the same idea in a converse way: to construct Byram’s framework of “intercultural communicative competence” with “electronic literacy” or IT literacy as its backdrop. The new objectives for ICC in the digital age derived from the findings of this study are listed in Table 8.1, followed by a discussion of their connection with the current ICC framework.

Table 8.1 New objectives for ICC in the digital age

Component	Objectives
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• open attitude to respect and welcome the different ways of using technologies from other cultures
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• develop knowledge of different Web cultures and the use of various tools
Skills of interpreting and relating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the ability to interpret online practices and products from another culture and to explain it and relate it to online practices and products from one's own
Skills of discovery and interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the ability to explore the various cultural resources created by other internet users on the Web and to make creative use of these resources to help express oneself in the communication.• the ability to negotiate the meanings of different ways of internet-mediated expression• use of different methods and strategies for expression in order to compensate the loss of paralinguistic and behavioural cues
Critical cultural awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the ability to critically evaluate the credibility of the resources we obtain online

If we revisit Byram’s (1997) framework of intercultural competence (2.3.2) with “electronic literacy” as its backdrop, we may need to consider the following things: First of all, in the “attitude” component, in addition to its original definition - *curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other culture and belief about one’s own*, for technology-facilitated communication, we may need our learners to develop open attitude to respect and welcome the possible different ways of using technologies from other cultures. This is especially important when many tele-collaborative studies (such as Belz, 2002; Ware, 2005) have indicated that the different web cultures can lead to miscommunication online. Findings in Chapter Four showed that the learners held different attitudes toward the use of new technologies (4.2.3) with some of the learners appearing to be more open to try out new software, which could suggest that it is important for learners to develop more confidence in trying and learning new possibilities of communication and expression through new technologies so that they can develop the relevant literacy to access and understand

other internet users' ways of communication and expression.

This is related to the second component "knowledge". The original definition of the second component "knowledge" is *knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and knowledge of the general processes of societal and individual interaction*. For online communication, learners also need to develop knowledge of different Web cultures and the use of various tools, especially the electronic literacy that enables them to understand the multi-modal ways of expression online (4.3.1). Similarly, the third component "skills of interpreting and relating" should include the ability to interpret online practices and products from another culture and to explain it and relate it to online practices and products from one's own. An example suggested by the finding in this study is the automatic scaffolding of IT literacy between the learners (4.2.4), which demonstrated the learners' ability to mediate the differences of IT usage between them.

The fourth component of ICC framework, the focused component in this study - "skills of discovery and interaction" - is especially crucial in the digital world. This component should contain the ability to discover new knowledge about a culture and its cultural practices through exploring the various cultural resources created by other internet users on the Web and to make creative use of these resources to help express oneself in the communication. Examples provided by the findings in this study are like P's use of Youtube website to introduce her own culture, T's WIKIpedia link in his WIKI page to introduce his hometown and J's Myspace link in his WIKI page to introduce his band. The "skills of discovery" should also include the ability to negotiate the meanings of different ways of internet-mediated expression used by each other as indicated by findings in 4.2.4., which showed that learners initiated negotiation on their internet-mediated expression when they could not understand the internet language used by each other.

It is equally important to learn to make use of different methods and strategies for expression in order to compensate for the loss of paralinguistic and behavioural cues in online communication. As suggested in 5.6.3, learners in this study used a lot of positive politeness strategies in their social interaction, which I argued was the result

of their intention to shorten the “virtual” distance between them created by the lack of visual and paralinguistic cues in a technology-mediated learning context. Finally, in online communication, we would expect the fifth component “critical cultural awareness” in the framework to be expanded to include the ability to critically evaluate the reliability of the resources we obtain online.

8.4 Pedagogical Implications

The findings in each chapter also provide pedagogical implications for intercultural learning in foreign language classroom including 1) interactional and questioning skill training, 2) developing learners’ ability to deconstruct, and 3) creation of personal learning environment.

Skill training

The findings that learners used different questioning techniques in the interaction (6.4.1) and negotiated communicative styles with their interlocutors in each situated context (5.6.1) support the view that it is unrealistic to teach “fixed” cultural knowledge to learners. Instead, what learners need to acquire is the awareness of the ‘individuality’ in intercultural communication as argued in 8.3.2 and then the skills (as suggested in 5.6.1 and 6.4.1) to discover and interact with the individual in each new encounter. Examples of social interactional strategy and questioning strategies demonstrated by the participants in empirical telecollaborative studies can be used as pre-exchange training materials. Teacher can discuss with learners the effects of different interactional and questioning strategies and the various communicative styles their interlocutors may hold.

In addition, it may be beneficial to the learners if teachers can provide more opportunities for their learners to interact with people of different backgrounds (not just UK or US) so that they can expand their world views and repertoires of interactional strategies to achieve what Kern et al (2004) have argued, that:

“...language educators should use the Internet not so much to teach the same thing in a different way, but rather to help students enter into a new realm of collaborative inquiry and construction of knowledge, viewing their expanding repertoire of

identities and communication strategies as resources in the process.” (2004: 254)

Ability to deconstruct

For the development of the “critical awareness of the media, political and institutional influences in shaping our ways of thinking” (point two in 8.3.2), we can make ‘deconstruction’ (Kubota, 2006) of cultural information a regular practice in classrooms. News, articles, TV programmes or films, which were used in previous telecollaborative studies for learners to compare the cultural differences, can be used in a different way. For example, instead of comparing how other’s culture is different or similar to ours from these materials, we can ask learners to examine and think about what stereotypical knowledge has been transmitted by these media. After an online intercultural exchange, learners can be encouraged to critically examine their own conversation to find out how their ways of thinking have been influenced by dominant social discourse.

Development of personal learning environments

The finding of the individual difference in technological use (point two of 4.6) supports the suggestion to develop a “Personal Learning Environment” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_personal_learning_environments) for online learners, one that would allow learners to construct their own learning environment and to decide what they want to learn.

Current virtual learning environments, such as the one supported by Blackboard, have been critiqued on account of its teacher-centred approach in the design of the user interface (Dron, 2008). Its current main interface design still follows the traditional Web1.0 format by relying on the teachers to provide course materials and control the structure of the website content. Although there are discussion forums, WIKIs, and chat rooms embedded in the course template that allow participant interaction, teachers still play a significant role in controlling the structure and procedure of the course. As findings in Chapter Four indicated, learner agency may be released when more freedom is provided for them (4.3.2). For a more learner-centred approach to be achieved in the course management system, the designer may need to take into consideration more about how to transform the teacher-dominated structure into a

more flexible and negotiable structure that allows learners' voices to be heard and enables learners to share and participate in the control of the course content.

Nowadays, teachers' identities have been disrupted, challenged and reconstructed by innovation in language teaching facilitated by the integration of technology in our classroom (White, 2007). We should also be aware that in a technology-facilitated learning environment, not only the teachers' identity but also learners' identities are transformed (Rea-Dickins, 2007, personal communication). We need to transform our students into more active, autonomous and independent learners by allowing them more freedom to shape the direction of their own learning. The shift of learners' agency is salient in what Ware (2003: 320) has argued in that the potential for online medium to facilitate intercultural learning is predicated on "students' ability to co-construct a learning environment that promotes such inquiry."

In sum, we need a curriculum that considers the dynamic nature of both culture and technology in our life as well as the diversified culture of the people who are using technologies. The fundamental goal is to promote both the individual voice and the global interaction through the facilitation of internet technologies.

8.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

8.5.1 Strengths

The significance and strengths of the study can be viewed from the following perspectives in relation to: 1) exploration of different analytical tools, 2) provision of empirical evidence to further operationalize the construct of "skills of discovery and interaction" in Byram's ICC framework, 3) integrating the educational research with sociolinguistic studies, and 4) connecting learners from different time zones for synchronous communication.

First of all, Ware (2003) has suggested that future studies would benefit from an exploration of different analytical tools that can be used for examining how intercultural competence develops and is expressed linguistically in online intercultural exchange. This study has re-examined the use of question types as an analytical tool (6.2), adapted theoretical frameworks from different disciplines for

analyzing social interaction online (5.2), and tried the concept of treating “interculturality” as a topic to explore in order to reveal the dynamic process of discursive co-construction of cultural identities online (7.2). The overall conclusions reached show that the tool of question types needs to be further refined while the categories derived from different theoretical frameworks for analyzing online social interaction proved to be useful in revealing the dynamic process of learners’ negotiation and co-construction of interactional conventions and cultural understandings.

Secondly, as Byram’s (1997) framework of intercultural competence was constructed with more general and abstract concepts in order for it to suit different contexts of use, this study has provided empirical evidence to demonstrate learners’ operation of “skills of discovery and interaction” in the online context between Taiwanese learners and UK learners. Chapter Six gave examples that illustrate what Byram (1997) meant by stating that “the intercultural speaker can use a range of questioning techniques to elicit from informants the allusions, connotations and presuppositions of a document or event” (1997:62). Further, Chapter Five showed how learners “used their knowledge of conventions of verbal and non-verbal interaction to establish agreed procedures on specific occasions” (1997:62).

In addition, this study has demonstrated the process and results of learners’ discursive co-construction of cultural identities by exploring learners’ use of “skills of discovery and interaction” in the online dialogue and then showed how learners developed intercultural competence in the process of co-construction and re-construction of intercultural understandings. This study can thus serve as a good example of interdisciplinary research – the research located between the disciplines of education, that is, the use of Byram’s framework of intercultural competence in foreign language education, and the disciplines of sociolinguistics, that is, the exploration of the dynamic and negotiated nature of culture and identity in our discourse.

In terms of the technological dimension, this study has contributed to the literature that investigated the use of synchronous tools for educational purposes. Little literature in foreign language education can be found to date that has explored the use

of synchronous tools for intercultural exchange although some of these tools, such as instant messengers, are actually replacing the role of emails and becoming a more favoured tool for communication among teenagers. The main reason for the lack of empirical studies on synchronous tools may be the difficulty of establishing the real-time connection between learners located in different time zones, as was the case in this study – the seven-hour difference in time zones means the working and resting time between the two places are exactly the opposite. The significance of the study lies on its success to break the time limitation so as to create the setting for researching on using synchronous tools for intercultural learning.

8.5.2 Limitations

In spite of the various strengths exhibited in this study, there are also inevitably some limitations. First of all, as the number of Chinese as foreign language (CFL) learners was small in the UK two years ago when I was seeking participants for the study, it was difficult to find CFL learners with similar backgrounds for this study. As a result, although English as foreign language (EFL) learners from Taiwan were of similar backgrounds, the CFL learners found in the UK displayed very different ethnic backgrounds – one English, one Scottish, one British-born Cantonese, one Thai, and one Sri Lankan. The five ethnically different participants in the UK created five very different interactional contexts with their Taiwanese interlocutors. This made it impossible for this study to provide a general picture to theorize the situation of intercultural learning for CFL learners in the UK.

Secondly, as the EFL learners in my study had an advanced level of English proficiency while the CFL learners were at a beginning level of Chinese proficiency, these learners mainly used English for communication. Although some of the CFL learners tried to use some Chinese for communication at the beginning, they soon gave up as their limited Chinese proficiency made it hard for them to express their ideas using the target language. Because of this constraint, this study was not completely ‘collaborative’ in terms that CFL learners were not able to practice their target language. One part of the original research design, that is, requiring learners to correct each other’s linguistic errors on WIKI pages, failed because the CFL learners

mainly constructed their WIKI pages in English.

Thirdly, because of the difficulty in finding suitable participants (3.5.1), the pilot study was only done partially. I only tested the viability of the internet tools (IM and WIKI) in this study and did not go through the whole process of research design. As a result, I was not able to find in advance the possibility of learners being interrupted by their other pals online while they were engaging in this online exchange. The participants did not compose their WIKI pages in the way I had envisaged in my initial design (3.5.2). Half of the learners did not revise their WIKI pages every time after their chat sessions. These unexpected results increased the difficulty in data analysis.

8.6 *Directions for Further Research*

Three directions are suggested here for further research in relation to 1) expanding the size, length, and scope of this study, 2) using different analytical approach, and 3) the assessment of intercultural competence.

8.6.1 Expanding the size, length, and scope of this study

This study was conducted with a small number of participants for an average period of five weeks. For future research, more participants should be involved to allow for the collection of more examples of “skills of discovery and interaction” in order to increase our further understandings of these strategies. Research over a longer timescale would also be helpful in identifying the learners’ regular practice.

Additional studies need to be undertaken so as to see how different situated contexts may influence learners’ use of interactional and questioning strategies. Besides, this study only explored pair interaction. The interactional and questioning strategies can be much more complicated when the intercultural interaction happens in a group with more than three people. Intercultural communication in real life can involve a group of people with diversified cultural backgrounds. Future studies in telecollaborative intercultural exchange can try to connect learners from three or more different countries or social groups to see how learners interact and cooperate with each other under this condition.

8.6.2 Different analytical approach

As suggested in the dissertation, it is the case that the homogeneous and fixed view of culture is questionable. We thus need more studies that can open our eyes to see the diversified and changing nature of culture so that these new perspectives on culture can reach the policy makers and teachers. Previous telecollaborative studies have appeared to reinforce certain cultural stereotypes by attributing the failed communication between learners to the pre-ascribed national cultural differences (2.4.2). Studies on causes of failed communication are of value in the sense that practitioners of intercultural exchange can be informed and better prepared before the a pedagogic activity starts. However, researchers should be careful about making hasty stereotypical judgement about learners' behaviours to explain the miscommunication and generalizing situations of single cases to national levels. For future studies, analytical approaches based on a non-essentialist view of culture should be adopted to interpret the failed cases of learner communication. For example, in Chapter Seven, the concept of "interculturality as a topic to be explored" (2.2.4) has been applied to reveal the dynamic process of learners' co-construction and re-construction of cultural understandings. A similar approach may be tried to investigate how "misunderstandings" is co-constructed in the intercultural communication.

8.6.3 Assessment of intercultural competence

A third and important issue to consider is the assessment of intercultural competence, which foreign language educators have not paid enough attention to so far mainly because of the difficulty in evaluating and assessing the abstract components of "attitude", "skills" or "awareness" often stated in the framework of intercultural competence. However, these "abstract" and "hard-to-assess" abilities can be more influential than linguistic competence for successful communication. We need more studies that take a careful investigation of these specific components to help us realize more about the development and performance of "intercultural competence" so that we can be more confident to develop a reliable and effective way of assessing this competence. At the moment, INCA project⁶ (INtercultural Competence Assessment)

⁶ <http://incaproject.org/tools.htm>

has developed three different types of tests (questionnaires, scenarios, role plays) for assessing intercultural competence, which were designed based on a framework also developed by the INCA project. The theory underpinning the development of the framework was formulated from the theoretical work of INCA partners coming from different European countries. Byram's (1997) framework of intercultural competence has played an important role in the formation of the INCA theory. However, we need more studies to investigate the validity and reliability of these tests as well as their suitability for different learning contexts.

8.7 Reflection

The process of completing the whole research has been more inspiring and influential to my life than I expected. Although this study focused on "internet-mediated" intercultural dialogue between university students in Taiwan and in the UK, I myself, as an international student from Taiwan, have been experiencing a face-to-face intercultural dialogue with UK society since the very start of this research. At the time of my arrival in the UK and commencing this doctoral study, I had quite a limited amount of knowledge about UK society and theories on culture and intercultural communication, apart from some essentialist ideas about what UK people and society are normally like from what I have learnt in formal education and seen in movies or TV programs available in Taiwan. At that time, I was very often frustrated by my inability to understand the various accents of English spoken by people with different regional or national backgrounds in the UK and I tended to attribute the failure in communication with people to the cultural differences between us. As a PhD researcher, I was very unconfident in myself, hesitant to express my opinions and unable to find my own voice and direction for my research.

In my first encounter of postmodernist and non-essentialist theory of culture and identity in the literature, I was immediately fascinated by the freedom its central idea provides to our way of thinking and looking at the world. The concept has had a huge impact on my research as well as my life. In this research, I thus focused my study on the dynamic nature of intercultural interaction. In life, I learnt to cast away the stereotypical images on people and also on the English language itself. I learnt to appreciate the different accents of English surrounding me and to understand why

certain people behave in certain ways from their perspectives. I have ever since tried very hard to avoid the statements like “British people are always” or “French people are all”

On the other hand, the new understanding of culture and identity as constructed in our discourse gradually brought changes to the way I think about myself and my own research. I realized that learning, as conceptualised by Wenger (1998), is a process of constant becoming as every moment is a new opportunity for me to learn and to negotiate and re-construct a new identity for myself. For my research, what I needed to do was to understand what and how other researchers are doing in the related areas and to find my own identity in these areas through the discourse I have constructed in my own dissertation.

I would like to use the following extract from Alain de Botton’s (2003) book “The Art of Travel” to illustrate my feeling toward the process of doing the PhD study:

We have all, without choosing, been scattered at birth by the wind on to a country, but, like Flaubert, we are in adulthood granted the freedom imaginatively to re-create our identity in line with our true allegiances.

The process of doing the PhD study is like my experience in travelling (maybe not as relaxed as travelling though) – at the beginning, I was eager to visit as many places and countries as I could with my limited budget and time in the three to four years of my stay in Europe. As a result, those visited places did not leave any deeper impression in me except their names, rough landscape and famous landmarks. My reading process for the PhD study was exactly like the experience of travelling – I did not have real dialogue with those readings until the moment when I started to write and then realized that I seriously lacked my own voice; that is, my identity in the academic field that I am working on. What enchants me in the quote from de Botton’s book is the idea of our ability to transcend our current self and to re-create our identity by searching and aligning with things and thoughts that really resonate with our mind, which has motivated me tremendously to look for and to understand other researchers’ voices and to create a dialogue with them by giving my own voice. I am contented to find myself enthusiastic about life and research in the process of moving towards the completion of this doctoral research.

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Appendix A: Pre-Exchange Questionnaire

- 1. Name:
- 2. Gender: male
- 3. Age:
- 4. Nationality:
- 5. Place of birth:
- 6. How long you were at your birth town/city: years
- 7. Other countries you’ve lived in:
- 8. How long for and why:
- 9. Native language:
- 10. Other languages you can speak and competency level:
- 11. Subject you are studying:
- 12. Current year of study:
- 13. Why you decided to study Mandarin:
- 14. How long you have studied Mandarin: months
- 15. Briefly describe your travel experience:
- 16. On a scale of 1 to 5, place an X in the box to show how experienced you are at:
[1 = inexperienced, 3 = average, 5 = experienced]

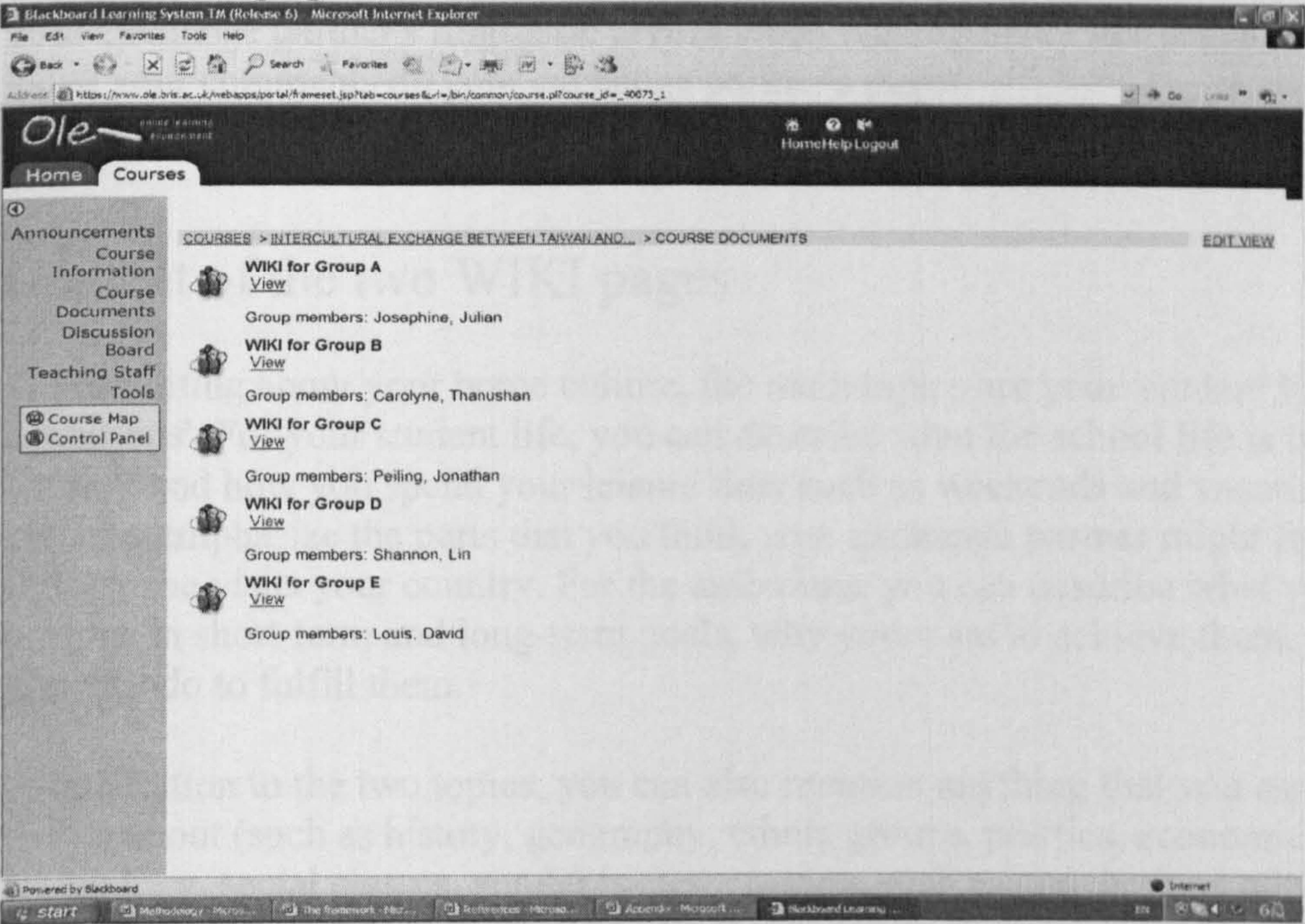
	1	2	3	4	5
Email	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Instant messaging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blogging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using WIKIs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. For the five talk sessions you are going to hold with the Taiwanese participant, please specify when you are most likely to be available throughout June and July by placing an X into boxes where you are free. Please show as much availability as possible to ensure matching the time with your partner will be easier.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
	26	27	28	29	30	Jul 1	2
10am – 11am	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2pm – 3pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10am – 11am	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2pm – 3pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
10am – 11am	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2pm – 3pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
10am – 11am	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2pm – 3pm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B: Course Instruction

Course Webpage: www.ole.bris.ac.uk



Languages used for this exchange

For participants from Taiwan, please use English for all the communication in the exchange and help correct your exchange partner's Mandarin Chinese mistake if there is any.

For participants from the UK, you can use both English and Mandarin Chinese for constructing the WIKI pages and conducting the online chat. Please use Pinyin system for Mandarin Chinese input. Please help correct your exchange partner's English mistake if there is any.

For the participants who are not familiar with the Pinyin system, please visit the WIKIpage for further information <http://en.WIKIpedia.org/WIKI/Pinyin>

Using WIKI

1. Click on the WIKI link for your group in "**Course Documents**" in course webpage.
2. Click on the links in your WIKI to go to your two pages.
3. Click on "**Edit Page**" and then you can construct or revise the content of your page. (Remember to save the content after editing the page.)

4. Visit your exchange partner's pages, read and think about what he or she has written, and prepare what you are going to discuss on the instant messenger.
5. You can be an editor of your exchange partner's pages as well. You can help correct your exchange partner's **linguistic errors** when reading his or her pages. You can also leave your comments on your exchange partner's pages.

Content of the two WIKI pages

1. For writing about your home culture, the main topics are your 'student life' and 'ambitions'. For your student life, you can describe what the school life is like in your country and how you spend your leisure time such as weekends and vacations. You can also emphasize the parts that you think your exchange partner might feel different if he or she visits your country. For the ambitions, you can describe what you want to achieve in short-term and long-term goals, why you want to achieve them, and how you will do to fulfill them.
2. In addition to the two topics, you can also mention anything that you especially like to talk about (such as history, geography, ethnic groups, politics, economics, technology, social classes, gender issues, customs such as conventions of behaviour and beliefs and taboos in routine situations, education, religion, work patterns, languages and dialects, food, fashion, ...)
3. For writing about the target culture, you can describe your current experiences, impressions or understandings toward the target culture. For example, what pictures come to your mind when you think about the target culture? What will you associate with the target culture? Where do you think your ideas come from, e.g., from TV, books, experience, etc.?
4. In addition to the understandings, you can also mention what you'd like to know more about the target culture by raising some questions at the end.
5. Most of you have good experience in travelling. You can exchange ideas on this and also discuss with your partner about your experience or ideas on intercultural communication in the travel.
6. After each talk session, you'll come back to your WIKI pages and revise them according to your new understandings of both cultures from the talk. If possible, please find at least three interesting points from the talk for revising each page after each talk. You can also increase the width and depth of the questions you'd like to explore about the target culture.
7. You can add images or links to your pages if you'd like to.

Using Google Talk

1. Please email your exchange partner and the researcher your new Google Mail

account and then add your exchange partner and the researcher into the chat contact.

2. When you and your exchange partner are both online, you can start the chat on the Google Mail interface. The chat will then be saved in a format just like emails.

3. After each talk session, please forward the chat history to the researcher. In the same email, please describe any problems that you encounter in the talk. (The problems can be cultural, linguistic, technological, or personal ones; the purpose is to avoid any possible misunderstandings in the process of interaction.) The researcher will then reply the chat emails by answering the problems you raise and also by highlighting some parts in your chat history with some questions or comments. You are welcome to discuss more with the researcher on these questions or comments.

Ethnographic Interview Techniques (Corbett, 2003)

Although the talk between you and your exchange partner is more like casual conversation, you can use some interview techniques 'implicitly' to help you elicit more cultural information from your interlocutor. A structured guide to interview technique is given in Spradley (1979). Key points to consider include:

- Try, if possible, to interview the respondent more than once, over time. (The design of this exchange is exactly for you to do this.)
- Decide in advance which general themes or topics you wish to cover in the first interview. (That's why you are asked to construct the two WIKI pages before the talk.) This provides a sense of direction and purposefulness to your exchange.
- Listen to the interviewee's responses to establish further topics to follow up later, in more focused interviews.
- Avoid 'leading questions' of the kind, 'How do you show that you are proud to be Scottish?' This assumes that the respondent is proud to be Scottish.
- Elicit information with as little evaluation as possible. Back-channelling, or repeating what the respondent has just said, often encourages the respondent to elaborate. Alternatively, probe the interviewee's responses by asking questions like, 'What do you mean by - ?'.
- Encourage interviewees to elaborate on topics. Do not be in a hurry to hasten them on to new topics by asking a new direct question after they have given a brief response to an earlier question.

Spradley, J. (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Appendix C: Post-Exchange Questionnaire

Q1: Please briefly describe how you feel about each part of the design in this project, especially the problems you encountered. It will be appreciated if you can give some suggestions for improving the design of the project.

- the course webpage
- the course instruction
- the use of instant messenger
- the use of WIKI pages
- topics for discussion
- the date and time arrangement
- the pairing of participants
- the communication between you and your exchange partner
- the languages used in the exchange
- the email communication between you and the researcher
- reflection on the talk via emails
- other problems and suggestions

Q2: What do you think you’ve benefited the most from the exchange?

Q3: From scale one to five, please indicate the relevance of the following reasons for you to participate the exchange [1 = irrelevant, 3 = average, 5 = highly relevant]

	1	2	3	4	5
knowing about a different culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
practice Mandarin Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
making new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
interest in travelling in Asia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
possibly will work or study in Asia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
enhance the ability to use technologies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other reasons					

Q4: From scale one to five, please indicate how much your expectations have been fulfilled in this exchange [1 = not fulfilled, 3 = average, 5 = fulfilled]

	1	2	3	4	5
knowing about a different culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
practice Mandarin Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
making new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
enhance the ability to use technologies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q5: For the unfulfilled expectations, please briefly explain the reasons.

Q6: Brief technology survey

What instant messengers have you ever used?

Yahoo messenger	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skype chat	<input type="checkbox"/>	AOL instant messenger	<input type="checkbox"/>
MSN messenger	<input type="checkbox"/>	Google talk	<input type="checkbox"/>	Others:	

Which one do you like the most? Yahoo messenger

Why?

What do you usually use instant messengers for?

Have you used WIKI before? Yes

If yes, what do you usually use WIKIs for?

What software or website do you use?

How do you like it?

Q7: Comparing to the classroom learning, how do you feel about the *informal* learning as shown in this project?

Q8: Comparing to face-to-face intercultural exchange, what do you think about the *virtual* intercultural exchange? Especially its advantages and disadvantages.

Q9: Will you keep the talk with your partner after the project ends? Why or why not?

Q10: Do you mind to share your WIKI pages with other participants in this project?

Yes (If yes, your WIKI pages won't be shown in the course webpage.)

Q11: What's the impression of Taiwan you got from this exchange?

Q12: In what way is the impression different from or similar with the impression you held before?

Q13: Does the talk with your exchange partner evoke some of your reflection or thoughts on your own culture? If yes, what is it about?

Q14: How would you define "culture"? Has the exchange changed your view on culture? If yes, what is the change?

Appendix D: Strategies of Positive Politeness (Adapted from Brown and Levinson, 1978)

Strategy	Example
(P+1): Notice, attend to H (his interest, wants, needs, goods)	Your skirt is lovely, where did you get it?
(P+2): Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)	How absolutely extraordinary!
(P+3): Intensify interest to H (to involve H into the conversation)	There were a million people in the Co-op tonight...
(P+4): Use in group identity markers	Hello “mate”, long time no see!
(P+5): Seek agreement	Art is something we can always enjoy later in our life, isn’t it?
(P+6): Avoid disagreement	A: That’s where you live? B: That’s where I was born.
(P+7): Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	Don’t you need to go to the interview? Are you at home now?
(P+8): Joke	I won’t lock my keys in my scooter again.
(P+9): Assert or presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants	I know you wanted the last book by Paxman but they didn’t have it so I got you this one instead
(P+10): Offer, promise	I’ll send you those documents next week!
(P+11): Be optimistic	I’ll talk to you soon
(P+12): Include both S and H in the activity	We’re a bit tired, aren’t we?
(P+13): Give (or ask for) reasons	I’m really late for the interview, so...
(P+14): Assume or assert reciprocity	I’ll help you with your Spanish I hope you can do the same with my English
(P+15): Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)	I hope you are not too stressed with your exams

Appendix E: Strategies of Negative Politeness (Adapted from Brown and Levinson, 1978)

Strategy	Example
(P-1): Be conventionally indirect	Can you please tell me the time?
(P-2): Questions, hedge	This may not be relevant but...
(P-3): Be pessimistic	Could you set the table?
(P-4): Minimize the imposition	I just dropped by for a minute to ask you...
(P-5): Give deference	Excuse me, sir, would you mind if I close the window?
(P-6): Apologize	I don't want to bother you, but...
(P-7): Impersonalize S and H	Is it possible to ask a favour?
(P-8): State the FTA as a general rule	We don't eat with our hands, we eat with knives and forks
(P-9): Nominalize	We urgently require your help
(P-10): Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H	I'd really appreciate it if you would...

Appendix F: Social Presence Classification and Indicators (Adapted from Garrison and Anderson, 2003)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Example</i>
Affective	Expressions of emotions	Conventional or unconventional expressions of emotions such as repetitious punctuation, conspicuous capitalization, emoticons	'I just can't stand it when...!!!'
	Use of humor	Teasing, irony, understatements, sarcasm	I won't lock my key in my scooter again.
	Self-disclosure	Presents details of life outside of class or expresses vulnerability	I just had a slightly worrying moment myself...
Open communication	Complimenting, expressing appreciation	Complementing others or contents of others' messages	Your talk is more impressive than mine.
	Expressing agreement	Expressing agreement with others or content of others' messages	That's right!
	Asking questions	Asks questions of other students or the moderator	How old is your puppy?
	Referring explicitly to others' messages	Direct references to contents of others' posts	'In your WIKI, you mentioned that...'
Cohesive	Vocatives	Addressing or referring to participants by name	'Hey, Pei!'
	Using inclusive pronouns	Addresses the group as we, us, our, group	'Let's call it a day.'
	Phatics, salutations	Communication that serves a purely social function; greeting, closures	'Hi all,' 'We're having the most beautiful weather here''

Appendix G: Summary Table of Learners' Interactional Strategies (5.5)

Strategy	C&T	P&J
P-1. Minimize the imposition	C1C: Well...time is almost up @@ C2C: Well, time is almost up.	P2: do you need some time to rest? J3: are you ok to chat today?
P-2. Not assuming, give freedom of choice	C1: Hello, shall we start? C2: Hey, shall we start?	J1C: Shall we pick up from here tomorrow? J1C: could we start a little bit later just in case it is? P2C: shall we call it a day? J2C: speak to you tomorrow? P2C: do you mind if we start our talk an hour late tomorrow?
P-3. Apologizing about causing inconvenience to others	T1: Sorry, I didn't have enough time for that. T5: I think we overrun our time, sorry.	P1: so sorry for being late! J2: I just don't have time to type up my WIKI, my apologies P2C: sorry for the confusion P3: I'm soooo sorry!! P3: I am sorry! I had a terrible situation on my way home
P+1. Expressions of speaker's emotions	C1: @@ C2C: ^^ C2C: :) T5: :) C5: : D T5 R: :-h	J1: :-D P1C: >"< P1C: :) P1C: :) J1C R: :-) P1C: :) J1C R: :) J2C: :)
P+2.Self-disclosure	C2: (I spent most of my time today sleeping...) C2: (I spent more than 6 hours on the train yesterday...) C5: I love Taiwanese green tea. Proud of it.	P1: great! I went to a movie. J1 R: very tired, still recovering from the weekend! J1C: I wasn't too sure what to say at first P1C R: me, too It's a bit awkward at first. J2: yes, just in the door this minute.....three hours...but it seems very tiring...I am just reading your WIKI J3: I just had a slightly worrying moment myself an email from my tutor to go and see him.....
P+3.Use of humor	T2: Not surprising	J3: I was just about to leave so good timing!
P+4. Phatics expression	Clc: Then see you next time. Nice talking to you... T1cR: Nice to talk to you. Talk to you soon T2: How are you? T2c: Take care	J1: how are you doing today? P1 R: how are you? P1C: Nice to talk to you :) J1C R: Yes, and you!

	<p>C5: May good bless you. T5 R: wish you all the best T5: take care</p>	<p>P1C: good afternoon then ☺ J1C R: great...until then, you have a good evening too.. J2C: cool ... well have a good night P2C: talk to you soon! J2C: night! P3: so how are you doing today?</p>
P+5.Show concerns, sympathy, understanding	<p>T2: I would imagine. Are you returning back today? T2c: enjoy your stay with your family. Talk to you soon. C5: Don't worry. C5: I will bring some Taiwanese tea to you.</p>	<p>J1: no worries P2: so are you at home now? J3: Don't worry about it J3: oh dear.....are you ok to chat today?</p>
P+6.Being supportive	<p>C5: Hope to see you in UK T5 R: Keep in touch. See you sometime in UK.</p>	<p>J1C: but I think these is still plenty of things to talk about J1C: it can only get easier J2: hehe, it'll be up after we finish today</p>
P+7.Give reasons to explain actions	<p>C2c: My father has kept urging me to dinner... C5: I am going to the library to hit on books now.</p>	<p>J1C: I'm actually traveling home tomorrow..... P2C: I've got to go and feed my puppy</p>
P+8.Use vocative or inclusive expressions	<p>C1: Shall we start? C1c: Shall we start? T5: we overrun our time.</p>	<p>J2: hey Pei J1C: Shall we pick up from here tomorrow? J1C: could we start a little bit later just in case it is? P2C: shall we call it a day? J2C: yes, let's call it a day</p>
P+9.Agreeing, Cooperative	<p>T1: Hello, of course C2c: Okay. Then I will work on sth about Taiwanese history. C5: Yes, keep in touch.</p>	<p>P1C: sure! J2C: yes, let's call it a day J2C: yep, I'll speak to you then ☺</p>
P+10.Compliment and express appreciation	<p>T2c: it's an interesting talk C5: your talk is much more profound and impressive than mine T5: good to learn about your history and your culture C5 R: Me too. T5: Great C5: Thanks Shumei for giving me the opportunity to make a new friend T5 R: I have to thank her too.....pleasure is mine. C5 R: Thank you anyway.....</p>	<p>P1C: but you are an interesting people to talk to :P J1C R: you too ☺ P1C: thank you :) P2C: thank you! : D P2C: cheers! :D</p>
P+11.Show interest	<p>T2c: That will be interesting.</p>	<p>J2C: I am quite jealous you have a puppy...how old? J2C: you should put a picture of her on your blog! J3: oh no, what happened</p>

Appendix H: Objectives for Each Component in ICC Framework (Byram, 1997)

Attitudes	Skills of Interpreting and Relating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality • Interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures • Willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment • Readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence • Readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins • the ability to identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present • the ability to mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomenon
Knowledge	Skills of Discovery and Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries • the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspectives of other countries • the national memory of one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own country • the national definitions of geographical space in one's own country and how these are perceived from the perspectives of other countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an explanatory system susceptible to other phenomenon • identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotation • identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances • use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors, taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country and culture and the extent of difference between one's own and the other • identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and country
	Critical Cultural Awareness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's • institutions and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and which conduct and influence relationships between them • the processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures • make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria • interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiation where necessary a degree of acceptance of them